MAIN STORIES

TRUMP'S CHILLING PROMISE

p.4

THE LAST WORD

The man who found a lost nuke

p.40

TALKING POINTS

How justice overcame privilege

p.17

Alex Murdaugh

THE WEEK

THE BEST OF THE U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

The speech police

DeSantis' escalating war on the press, 'woke' corporations, LGBTQ, and educators

p.5

MARCH 17, 2023 VOLUME 23 ISSUE 1121

VISIT…

On it.

Ending racial injustice requires all of us
to work together and take real action.
What can *you* do to help?

- [ ] Educate yourself about the history of American racism, privilege and what it means to be anti-racist.

- [ ] Commit to actions that challenge injustice and make everyone feel like they belong, such as challenging biased or racist language when you hear it.

- [ ] Vote in national and local elections to ensure your elected officials share your vision of public safety.

- [ ] Donate to organizations, campaigns and initiatives who are committed to racial justice.

---

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ad COUNCIL

Editor's letter

Back in 1735, newspaper printer Peter Zenger was charged with "seditious libel" for articles that accused the colonial governor of New York of corruption, stupidity, and incompetence. Zenger was acquitted in a jury trial that laid down a crucial foundation for free speech later incorporated into the Constitution. Nearly 300 years later, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and his allies want to go back over the same ground and erode this country's long tradition of press freedom. The Florida legislature is now getting ready to pass two bills that would make filing libel suits easier, especially for public officials—an echo of the seditious-libel laws that made the American colonists indignant. It's a continuation of the "opening up the libel laws" idea that Donald Trump often mooted but never acted on. The real goal of lowering the bar for libel suits is to silence investigative reporting and critical commentary with ruinous lawsuits that cost a fortune to defend.

The U.S. has gone back and forth on libel law over the centuries, and settled on its current jurisprudence with *New York Times v. Sullivan* in 1964. The history of that case is a study in bad-faith libel claims: Montgomery, Al., police commissioner L.B. Sullivan sued the *Times* over an ad protesting his department's treatment of Martin Luther King Jr. The intention then was to harass the national press by suing in places like Montgomery to leverage home court advantage. Florida legislators hope for something similar now. Chilling press freedom, though, makes a mockery of legitimate conservative criticism of "cancel culture," campus intolerance, and groupthink. Freedom of inquiry, government transparency, and discouraging frivolous litigation are goals that libertarians and conservatives have espoused for years. If DeSantis takes a wrecking ball to the First Amendment to applause on the Right, free speech will not be the only casualty. American conservatism itself will be redefined, with an authoritarian cast.

Mark Gimein
Managing editor

NEWS

4 **Main stories**
Trump's lonely CPAC; Senate rejects D.C. crime bill; Ukraine's bloody battle for Bakhmut

6 **Controversy of the week**
Florida Republicans flex their muscles with efforts to restrict speech

7 **The U.S. at a glance**
Domestic terrorism charges in 'Cop City'; Republicans blast Tucker Carlson

8 **The world at a glance**
U.S. tourists killed in Mexico; Israelis refuse military service; a treaty to protect the oceans

10 **People**
Paris Hilton, brainy blonde; Judy Blume vs. Moms for Liberty

11 **Briefing**
The East Palestine derailment exposes the rail industry's woes

12 **Best U.S. columns**
How a crime wave took down Lightfoot; the dangerous China panic

15 **Best international columns**
Iran accelerates its nuclear ambitions; Turkey's lost treasures

16 **Talking points**
Exploiting migrant kids; a lurid trial of South Carolina's elite; the Wuhan lab-leak theory

Haiyun Jiang/The New York Times/Redux, Getty

Donald Trump speaks to his mega-fans at CPAC (p.4).

ARTS

23 **Books**
The first U.S. climate change migrants

24 **Author of the week**
An overnight success riding his daughter's love

26 **Music & Home Media**
Morgan Wallen just keeps singing

28 **Film**
Chris Rock's belated Oscar slapback

Paris Hilton (p.10)

LEISURE

31 **Food & Drink**
Fried chicken with a Persian flair; the best dining in Savannah

32 **Travel**
Savoring the world's oldest rain forest; a pit stop in LBJ's hometown

BUSINESS

36 **News at a glance**
Walgreens limits abortion-pill sales; U.S. sues to stop JetBlue-Spirit merger

37 **Making money**
Burnout and the glass ceiling; the benefits of separate tax filing

38 **Best columns**
Tesla's 20 million–vehicle 'master plan'; Amazon's HQ bait and switch

THE WEEK

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The main stories…

At CPAC, Trump promises ‘retribution’

What happened

Donald Trump showed his enduring grip on the Republican Party’s populist base at the Conservative Political Action Conference last weekend, dominating the annual gathering with an ominous keynote speech in which he vowed to get revenge for Americans who have been “wronged and betrayed” by liberal and Republican elites. “I am your warrior,” he told them. “I am your justice. I am your retribution.” Once a magnet for GOP leaders and presidential contenders, this year’s CPAC was sparsely attended and shunned by many prominent Republicans, including presidential hopeful Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy. Speakers included Donald Trump Jr., his girlfriend, Kimberley Guilfoyle, and Trump’s daughter-in-law Lara Trump, and vendors did a brisk business in Trump bobbleheads and T-shirts depicting Trump as the Terminator and Superman. Former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley tried to make a case for her presidential candidacy, but was heckled by Trump supporters. She drew only 3 percent in a straw poll of attendees that Trump won handily, taking 62 percent to DeSantis’ 20 percent.

The conference was dominated by Trumpists.

In Trump’s 90-minute speech, he said the U.S. is becoming a “crime-ridden, filthy communist nightmare,” and cast himself as the Republicans’ sole hope in an “epic battle” against “sinister forces.” He vowed not to drop out of the race if he is indicted in any of the numerous investigations he faces, and refused to say whether he’ll sign a pledge to back the GOP nominee if he loses the primary. “There are probably people that I wouldn’t be very happy about endorsing,” he said.

What the columnists said

Trump’s speech was filled with “echoes of the very worst movements that modern humankind has produced,” said **Will Bunch** in ***The Philadelphia Inquirer***. The promise to avenge his followers’ humiliation by “sinister forces” came straight from the playbooks of Mussolini and Hitler. Trumpism can be fairly called “the f-word—fascism.” He even vowed to send National Guard troops into cities to lock up criminals and restore order. This CPAC was full of “flashing sirens for American democracy.”

Trump’s promise to deliver retribution is admittedly “horrifying,” said **Rod Dreher** in ***The American Conservative***, but the Left needs to ask itself why he remains so popular among millions of Americans. Maybe it’s that they resent seeing migrants pour across our borders, communities riddled with drugs and crime, the loss of middle-class jobs, and a “woke ruling class” that discriminates against whites for their skin color and teaches children “to hate their own bodies and think that they might be happy if they severed their breasts or testicles.”

Given the “carnival atmosphere” and the parade of loons like Mike “MyPillow” Lindell, said **John Cassidy** in ***The New Yorker***, it’s easy to dismiss CPAC as “mere fodder for late-night comedians.” But we laugh at our peril. Republican voters cheered as Lindell claimed 10 million Trump ballots were stolen, columnist Gordon Chang asserted that China spread Covid on purpose, and *Daily Wire* host Michael Knowles called for transgenderism to be “eradicated from public life.” What if treating Trump and these far-right wingnuts “as a joke” just repeats “the mistake that many political observers made in 2016?”

CPAC might be “Trump’s high-water mark rather than his launchpad,” said **Henry Olsen** in ***The Washington Post***. Yes, he romped in the straw poll of a crowd of hard-core Trumpers, but past CPAC poll winners have included Jack Kemp, Phil Gramm, Rand Paul, and Ron Paul. So it would be a mistake to read much into this poll. In his speech and a campaign video, Trump sounded desperate, and made “bizarre” promises—like building futuristic “freedom cities” on federal land and making America “the leader in developing flying cars.” That will give DeSantis “a lot of targets to shoot at.”

Still, Trump remains the GOP’s “clear frontrunner,” said **Joe Walsh** in ***The Bulwark***. The Trump devotees who thronged CPAC, and its “boiling cauldron of batshit-crazy stew,” are not a “loony far-right fringe” of the GOP. “They *are* the party.” And they could care less that he ended his first term with an attempted coup. If it wasn’t clear before, it should be clear now: “The voting base of one of our two major political parties is completely radicalized.”

It wasn’t all bad

■ In 1897, 20 Black infantrymen cycled through 1,900 miles of snowy mountains and blistering plains to test whether the Army could form a bicycle corps. The grueling journey, which stretched from Montana to St. Louis, was nearly lost to history until cyclist Eric Cedeño decided to follow in the soldiers’ path for the expedition’s 125th anniversary. The 49-year-old completed his feat last July—with some luxuries such as air-conditioned breaks. “They rode in uniforms and carried heavy rifles on their backs,” he said. “These guys were almost superheroes.”

■ **As a teenager, Tony Gemignani captivated crowds at his brother’s Castro Valley, Calif., pizzeria by performing intricate tricks with dough, including throwing it 15 feet into the air. More than three decades later, Gemignani has become a renowned “pizza acrobat”—yes, that’s a competitive sport—taking home 13 world championship titles as well as several Guinness World Records, such as the largest pizza base spun in two minutes, at 33.2 inches wide. Gemignani, who now owns 40 pizzerias across the country, participates in highly competitive live performances that evaluate each thrower’s dexterity, showmanship, and creativity. “You need agility,” Gemignani said. “It’s always a little different every time you do it. The dough is always changing.”**

Gemignani’s big spin

■ When 8-year-old Kayzen Hunter learned that his favorite waiter needed financial help, the young Waffle House regular asked his mom if he could raise money for Devonte Gardner, who was living in a motel with his wife and two daughters after their home became contaminated with black mold. Kayzen set up a GoFundMe for Gardner, and donations soared to more than $30,000—enough for Gardner to afford a car and a year’s worth of apartment payments. “I started crying—I’d been quietly struggling,” Gardner said. “As far as my little buddy goes, he’s my best friend for life.”

Getty (2)

Illustration by Howard McWilliam.
Cover photos from Getty, Mark Mauno, Shutterstock

Ukraine grinds away at Wagner Group in Bakhmut

What happened

The battle for Bakhmut intensified this week, as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky vowed not to withdraw his troops even after Russia's paramilitary Wagner Group claimed control of the city's east. The small salt-mining city has been the focus of Russia's offensive for months, and Russian forces now surround it on three sides. Wagner Group commanders have been sending in waves of unseasoned prison recruits, knowing they will be mowed down by Ukrainian artillery, so the commanders can see the locations of the Ukrainian guns and launch targeted attacks. The carnage has been immense. Russia has lost an estimated 30,000 soldiers in Bakhmut, seven times the Ukrainian casualties, and Ukrainians say they've seen Russians reduced to fighting in hand-to-hand combat armed only with shovels. While some Western military analysts have suggested that Ukraine should abandon the town and devote its resources to preparing for a southern counteroffensive, Ukrainian commanders said that continuing to fight in Bakhmut was key to depleting Russia's forces. "This is their last stand," Col. Serhiy Cherevaty told Radio Liberty.

Ukrainians fire on Russian forces.

A grainy 12-second video showing what appeared to be the machine-gun execution by Russian forces of a Ukrainian soldier circulated widely on social media this week. The Ukrainian military said it believed the man was a soldier with the 30th Mechanized Brigade who had been fighting near Bakhmut and went missing last month. Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba asked the International Criminal Court to investigate the incident, calling it "another [piece of] proof this war is genocidal."

What the columnists said

Bakhmut has come to symbolize "the grinding war of attrition in Ukraine," said **Claire Parker** in ***The Washington Post***. While the city is not strategically important, it has gained "outsize political importance for both sides" simply because the fighting has been so intense. Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin is using the battle there as a showpiece as he "jockeys with Russia's military chiefs for influence." And for Ukrainians, "'Bakhmut holds' is a rallying cry."

The executed soldier in the video has become another "icon of defiance," said **Cathy Young** in ***The Bulwark***. The clip shows him standing in a shallow trench, looking exhausted but calmly smoking a cigarette. Showing little emotion, he calls out the national salute "*Slava Ukraini*"—"Glory to Ukraine"—just before off-camera Russians curse at him and release "a burst of automatic gunfire." With his image already appearing on posters and murals, his "senseless killing" will almost certainly make Ukrainians "more determined to win."

Unfortunately, the Biden administration is helping to prolong the war through its reluctance to send Ukraine advanced weaponry, said **Matthew Continetti** in ***National Review***. With no decisive Ukrainian advances in months, U.S. public support for aid to Ukraine is slipping. The administration needs a victory strategy now, and that should include invoking the Defense Production Act and ramping up defense spending. Ukraine is "the central front in the fight for freedom," and it's in America's interest to give Zelensky all he needs—"and when he asks for it."

Democrats divided as Congress stops D.C. crime bill

What happened

Congress blocked Washington, D.C.'s controversial Revised Criminal Code Act this week, as Democrats sought to balance support for D.C. home rule with fears of being seen as soft on crime. The bill had become a flashpoint in debates over crime, and an increasing number of Senate Democrats voiced opposition. President Biden said that he would not veto efforts to reverse it, breaking with the party's history of supporting D.C.'s self-determination. With homicides up 40 percent and carjackings increasing, opponents argued this is not the time for revamping a 122-year-old code by reducing sentences for violent crimes. Even D.C.'s Democratic mayor, Muriel Bowser, vetoed the bill. The D.C. Council overrode her veto, but last month, 31 House Democrats joined Republicans in voting to overturn the bill, and the Senate was expected to follow suit. "I support D.C. Statehood and home-rule," President Biden tweeted, "but I don't support some of the changes D.C. Council put forward over the Mayor's objections—such as lowering penalties for carjackings."

The D.C. bill aimed to modernize an archaic document, making penalties more consistent, eliminating almost all mandatory minimums, and giving judges the ability to enhance sentences by stacking charges. It would go into effect in 2025, but Bowser has suggested revisions that include delaying it to 2027. Despite concerns about the code, she condemned Senate intervention for infringing on the right of D.C. residents to make their own decisions. "Until we are the 51st state," she said, "we live with that indignity."

What the columnists said

"If Democrats really believed in D.C. home rule, they would not be debating the merits of this bill," said **Mark Joseph Stern** in ***Slate***. The first time since 1991 that Congress has exercised its power to block D.C. legislation, this "sets an extraordinarily dangerous precedent." Democrats are only doing it "for cynical political reasons," but Biden's decision "will, perversely, make the District less safe." He and Congress "are telling D.C. residents that we are not allowed to protect our communities by enacting a criminal code that is coherent and consistent enough to work in the real world."

This debate is "exposing a deep fissure right down the middle of the Democratic Party," said **Jim Geraghty** in ***National Review***. Turning aside demands that he stand by D.C. home rule, Biden has left progressives "hanging out to dry." But with Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot losing re-election after being perceived as soft on crime, it's clear voters are worried about violence. Biden made the right decision, even if it caused his party to "melt down."

"Despite our grave concerns about the law, it shouldn't have come to this," said ***The Washington Post*** in an editorial. District leaders "should have acted on their own," but "now that the city is in this regrettable place," it has an opportunity to prove that safety and home rule aren't "incompatible values." The council should "go back to the drawing board" and write a new code that doesn't reduce sentences. It's "what their constituents want."

Daniel Berehulak/The New York Times/Redux

Controversy of the week

DeSantis: Escalating the war on free speech

Following the Orbán model

The weather may be better, said **Michelle Goldberg** in ***The New York Times***, but Florida is about to "start looking a lot like Hungary." Viktor Orbán, Hungary's far-right strongman prime minister, has become a hero on the American far right for seizing control of schools and colleges, the media, and the courts to promote traditional Christian values and defeat "cultural liberalism." No American politician is imitating Orbán "as faithfully as the Florida governor and likely Republican presidential candidate Ron DeSantis." As he ramps up a run for the GOP presidential nomination, DeSantis is gleefully using government power to control the state's schools, universities, and corporations, and to wage war on free speech. His allies in Florida's legislature recently unveiled a "shocking" new raft of bills that would ban Florida universities from offering majors in gender studies, teaching American history with a focus on slavery and racism, or sharing "unproven, theoretical, or exploratory content"—a phrase as purposefully vague as the ban on "inappropriate" books that has already emptied library shelves in Florida's K-12 schools.

The comparison to Orbán's "authoritarianism" is not hyperbole, said **Jonathan Chait** in ***New York*** magazine. To punish Disney for criticizing his "Don't Say Gay" law, DeSantis last week appointed a board of far-right ideologues to "oversee" the special district for Disney's Orlando theme park. Among them is conservative Christian minister Ron Peri, who claims that "estrogen in the water from birth control pills" is turning men gay. Disney's new overseers, DeSantis warned, "very much would like to see the type of entertainment that all families can appreciate." Or else. It gets worse, said **Kate Ruane** in ***USA Today***. DeSantis is backing another proposed Florida law that would "radically change the defamation protections" underpinning press freedom in America. If enacted, "public figures" could sue journalists for libel for exposing their affairs or personal crimes, and information obtained by anonymous sources would be considered "presumptively false." Publicly accusing a religious person like Peri of bigotry or discrimination, meanwhile, would "automatically count as defamation." If the law sounds unconstitutional, "its backers are counting on that," said ***The New York Times*** in an editorial. His cronies hope this "sledgehammer bill" will reach the Supreme Court, giving ultraconservative justices a chance to rein in "a news industry they consider to be too liberal."

Wait—don't conservatives want "more speech"? asked **Fabio Bertoni** in ***The New Yorker***. What DeSantis is doing in Florida "directly contradicts" the complaints of Republicans that free speech is under assault from Big Tech and the "woke mob." If DeSantis succeeds in lowering libel standards, said **Anthony L. Fisher** in ***The Daily Beast***, "his own right-wing media buddies would probably suffer the harshest consequences." It's the U.S.'s "robust protections for media freedom" that lets Fox News feed its viewers misinformation and bogus conspiracy theories.

Clearly, our country is in big trouble, said **Jonathan V. Last** in ***The Bulwark***. Polls show that 75 percent of GOP voters want either Trump or DeSantis as their next president, which means one of our two major parties yearns "to renegotiate the foundations of our governing compact." In 2024, the First Amendment, personal liberty, and democracy itself may be on the ballot. When the choice is between Ron DeSantis and Donald Trump, we've already strayed "way, *waaaaaay* outside the American political tradition."

Only in America

■ New York City police are now asking people to *remove* their face masks before entering stores. Some city residents still wear masks indoors, but amid a surge in robberies and shoplifting by masked criminals, NYPD Chief Jeffrey Maddrey said shoppers should at least briefly bare their faces for security cameras as a "sign of safety to store workers."

■ A lawmaker in Montana wants to ban Covid-vaccinated people from donating blood. State Rep. Greg Kmetz's bill would make it a crime to donate blood containing "novel mRNA or DNA pharmaceutical biotechnologies." About two-thirds of Montanans have been vaccinated, and critics say the bill would devastate Montana's blood supply. But Kmetz said anti-vaxxers "are the people that put me in this office."

Good week for:

Suing Elon Musk, after the Twitter CEO mocked fired employee Haraldur Thorleifsson, saying he used his muscular dystrophy as an "excuse" for why he "did no actual work." After Thorleifsson explained how the worsening disability has affected his ability to type, Musk apologized and offered him his job back.

DIY titles, after Prince Harry and Meghan Markle unilaterally awarded their 2-year-old daughter a royal title at her christening, calling her Princess Lilibet Diana. The royal family had no comment.

A glimpse of the truth, after a newly revealed text in the Dominion lawsuit against Fox News showed Tucker Carlson saying in 2021 he hoped to soon "ignore" Donald Trump, adding, "I hate him passionately."

Bad week for:

Useful idiots, after Fox News' Sean Hannity aired an interview in which Donald Trump claimed he would have prevented the war in Ukraine by "negotiating" a peace deal. Edited out was Trump's admission he would have let Russia "take over" parts of Ukraine.

Abstinence, after UCLA researchers found that participation in the online "NoFap" movement, which urges young men to pledge to refrain from masturbation, can instead lead to anxiety, depression, and shame when they inevitably give in.

Rep. George Santos, who was the target of a new bill, the "No Fortune For Fraud" Act. Representatives indicted or convicted of fraud would be barred from making money "from a book deal, a TV movie, *Dancing With the Stars*, or the next Netflix special," said co-sponsor Rep. Anthony D'Esposito (R-N.Y.).

In other news

White House mulls family detentions

The Biden administration is considering reinstating the practice of detaining migrant families who cross the border illegally, despite earlier promises of a more humane approach. The Biden administration has temporarily released migrant families into the country. But with the May expiration of Title 42—a pandemic-era policy that let authorities swiftly expel migrants—the White House anticipates a border surge. Meetings last week included discussions of reviving border detentions, with each family's stay capped at 20 days. Immigration advocates said the move could motivate migrant parents to send their children to the border unaccompanied. That would let them enter the U.S. but expose them to greater risks.

Getty

The U.S. at a glance...

Austin

Abortion lawsuit: Five women sued Texas this week, saying Texas' ban denied them abortions despite life-threatening risks. Two of the women had fetuses with no skulls; two others faced twin pregnancies that required one fetus to be aborted to save the other. The last, lead plaintiff Amanda Zurawski, 35, said she was denied an abortion because her fetus, which had no chance of surviving, still registered a heartbeat. Zurawski was only allowed to deliver after developing sepsis. Her baby died, and Zurawski suffered an infection that caused permanent damage. "Very few people would agree there is anything pro-life about this," she said. Under the current law, a physician can only provide an abortion after determining that a woman faces "substantial" harm without one. The plaintiffs—four of whom traveled out of state—say the standard is impossibly vague and leaves doctors wary of criminal prosecution for almost any abortion.

Plaintiffs speak.

San Bernardino Mountains, Calif.

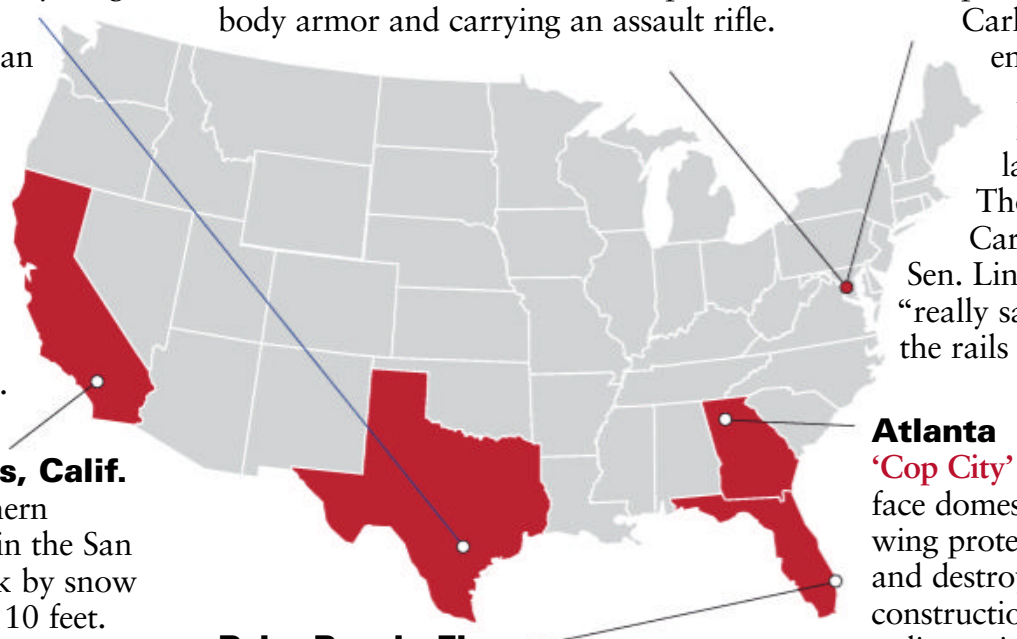
Snowed in: Thousands of Southern Californians remained trapped in the San Bernardino mountains this week by snow that reached heights as great as 10 feet. The California snowpack threatened to break a state record that's stood for 40 years, after relentless blizzards in recent weeks across the Sierra Nevada range. This followed nine powerful storms earlier this year, causing blackouts and extensive damage but also providing relief to a state that's suffered extreme drought. Although groundwater supplies will be slower to recover, major state reservoirs are now at 96 percent of average levels. This week about 16 million people across Central and Northern California were under flood watches. Still, Karla Nemeth, director of California's Department of Water Resources, said the state was fortunate to get snow and rain after "three very punishing years."

Buried in the mountains

Getty (2), AP, Reuters

Washington, D.C.

Shallow probe: Rep. Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) is facing growing pressure from Republicans to find evidence of federal law enforcement being "weaponized" against conservatives, *Axios* reported this week, after House Democrats questioned the credibility of the first three witnesses in Jordan's House investigation. Two witnesses—Stephen Friend, a former FBI special agent, and Garret O'Boyle, a suspended special agent—had received financial support from Kash Patel, a former Trump official. The third witness, retired FBI analyst George Hill, was revealed to have spread right-wing conspiracy theories, calling the Capitol attack a "setup." Right-wing media erupted over Friend's allegation that a SWAT team's raid of a Jan. 6 suspect constituted "excessive use of force," but Friend testified that it happened only after the suspect posted a video of himself outside the Capitol in body armor and carrying an assault rifle.



Palm Beach, Fla.

Cautious raid: The FBI search last August of former President Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate followed months of intense debate within the Justice Department, *The Washington Post* reported last week. FBI leaders reportedly argued that it would be best to seek Trump's permission to search his property, while DOJ prosecutors said there was a risk Trump would destroy or relocate documents that he'd refused to turn over to the National Archives. FBI agents feared that any mistakes could damage the FBI, and raiding his residence could lead Trump to publicly attack the agents involved, as he had after the FBI investigated the 2016 Trump campaign's ties to Russia. But prosecutors were emboldened when subpoenaed security footage showed someone moving boxes where records had been stored, and a federal judge authorized a search. Agents conducted the search in white polo shirts and khakis—a more low-key look than their traditional blue FBI jackets.

Washington, D.C.

Jan. 6 apologia: Senate Republicans this week blasted Fox News host Tucker Carlson for pointing to a handful of clips of Capitol rioters walking around the building as proof that the events of Jan. 6, 2021, were "mostly peaceful chaos." House Speaker Kevin McCarthy recently gave Carlson exclusive access to 41,000 hours of footage from the insurrection, and Carlson hyped what he'd seen as revelatory. Instead, the few clips he aired—filmed after the worst of the attack—appeared to have little impact. Still, Carlson said the footage "demolishes" the claim that an insurrection took place. Trump supporters who entered the Capitol "were orderly and meek," Carlson said. More than 110 law enforcement officers reported injuries after the attack, and four officers present that day later committed suicide. Sen. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.) called Carlson's account "bulls---," while Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) said it's "really sad to see Tucker Carlson go off the rails like that."

Carlson

Atlanta

'Cop City' clashes: At least 23 people will face domestic terrorism charges after left-wing protesters allegedly attacked officers and destroyed equipment this week at the construction site of a $90 million, 85-acre police training facility dubbed "Cop City" by opponents. Police said attackers, some clad in the black favored by antifa groups, used Molotov cocktails, commercial-grade fireworks, bricks, and large rocks, while trying to blind some officers by shining lasers into their eyes. Georgia officials have claimed for months that the demonstrators—who object to clearing trees in a forest near poor communities in order to build one of the country's largest police training facilities—are from outside the state, and police said all but two of those arrested this week are not from Georgia. Activist groups said this week's clashes with police took place amid a weekend concert, near where a shootout between police and protesters left one activist dead and a state trooper wounded.

Fires set at protest

The world at a glance...

Evicted

London

Royal drama at Frogmore: Britain's King Charles III has evicted Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, from their old house near Windsor Castle, royal sources told *The Times* (U.K.) this week. The couple were given use of Frogmore Cottage as a wedding gift and paid nearly $3 million to renovate it. After they stepped down as working royals in 2020 and moved to California, they continued to use the house when visiting London. The king, though, reportedly rescinded the gift after Harry released his tell-all memoir, *Spare*, this year. Now, Charles wants his brother Prince Andrew, who was stripped of royal duties three years ago over his association with pedophile Jeffrey Epstein, to move from his home at the palatial Royal Lodge to the humbler Frogmore. Andrew is reportedly resisting the downgrade.

'Free me from work.'

Paris

Crippling pension strikes: More than a million workers poured into French streets this week for what unions said was their biggest protest yet against proposed changes to pensions. For lack of staff, flights and trains were canceled, ports and oil refineries shut for the day, and many schools closed. Protesters are calling for French President Emmanuel Macron to drop his push to raise the age at which most French workers can claim full pensions from 62 to 64. Postal worker Micheline Houssais, 59, told *Le Monde* she'd expected to retire at 55, but the age for her sector was raised to 62 and will now go up again. "We feel like we've been grabbed by the throat," she said. The government says changes are necessary to close the pension system's projected $10.7 billion annual deficit. Lawmakers plan a final vote later this month.

Matamoros, Mexico

Americans killed: A trip to Mexico for a cheap medical procedure turned into tragedy last week for four Americans from South Carolina. Shortly after they crossed the border from Brownsville, Texas, the four were attacked by gunmen, who shot up their minivan and forced them into a truck. Mexican authorities say the gang may have mistaken the Americans for Haitian drug smugglers. Shaeed Woodard and Zindell Brown were killed. The other two Americans, Latavia McGee and Eric James Williams, were rescued by Mexican police, who found them in a house outside Matamoros; Williams was treated for leg wounds. McGee's mother said her daughter, a mother of six, had planned the trip so she could get a tummy tuck.

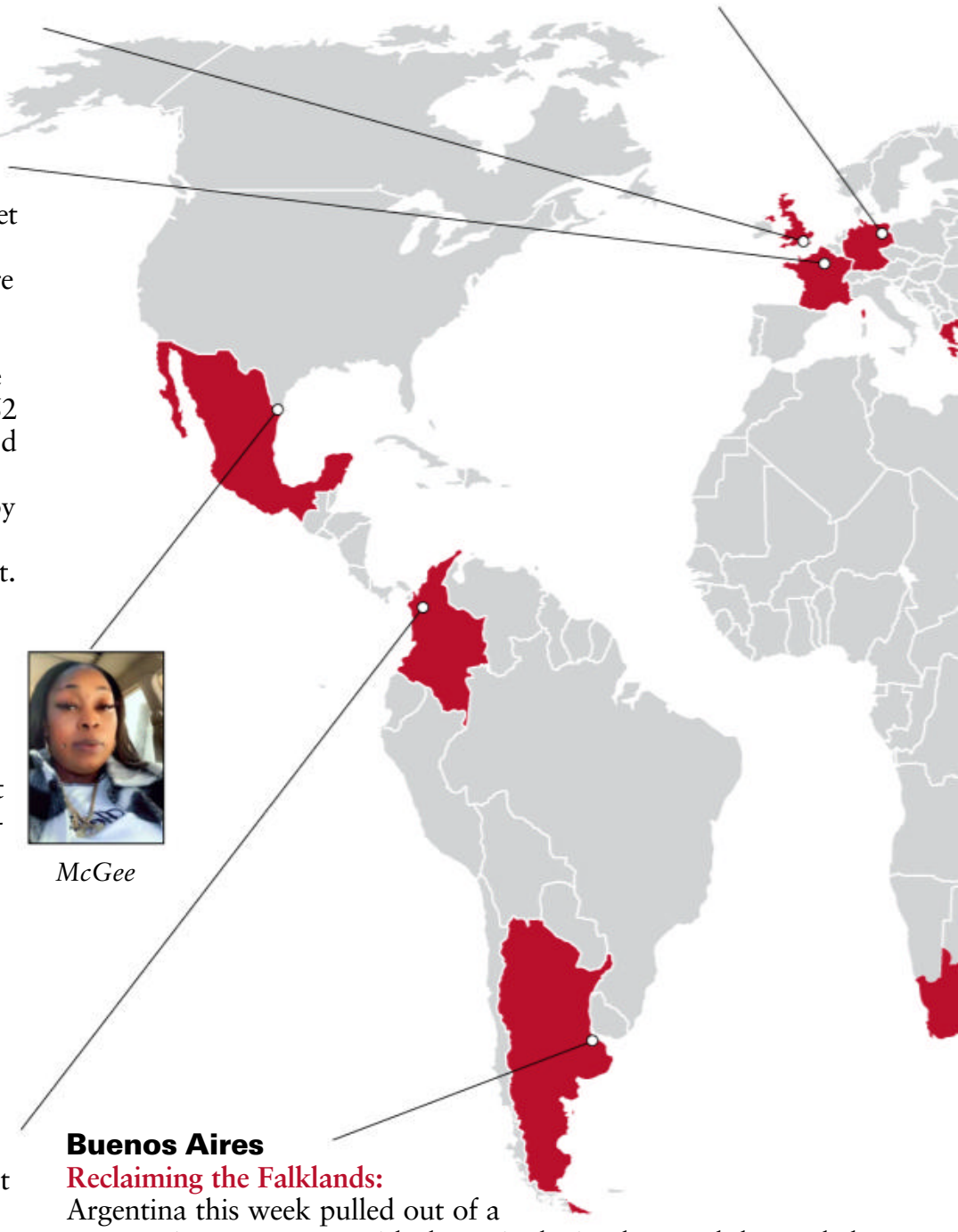
Medellín, Colombia

New homes for cocaine hippos: Colombia finally has a plan for controlling its "cocaine hippos," descendants of four animals that the late cocaine kingpin Pablo Escobar imported decades ago for his private zoo. Escobar surrendered in 1991, and the government let the hippopotamuses—three females and one male—roam free on his Hacienda Nápoles estate. With no natural predators, they multiplied and spread across central Colombia's Magdalena River region. There are now more than 130 of the aggressive, insatiable herbivores, the largest wild herd outside Africa, and they are devastating the environment and driving out native animals. Authorities plan to capture 70 of the hippos and send them to sanctuaries in India and Mexico. Without action, they said, the population could grow to 1,500 by 2040.

Relocating to a better home

Berlin

A lead on Nord Stream sabotage: German officials said this week they may have a lead in the investigation into the sabotage last September of the Nord Stream gas pipelines. The federal prosecutor said investigators had searched a rental ship that they believe was used to transport the explosives that damaged the two lines. Before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Europe was dependent on Russian gas supplied through the Nord Stream 1 pipeline, and Nord Stream 2 was about to come online. Russia has blamed the explosion on "Anglo-Saxon powers" seeking to prevent European countries from buying Russian gas. But U.S. intelligence officials told *The New York Times* this week that they suspect pro-Ukraine saboteurs—although they said there was no indication that Ukrainian authorities had any knowledge of it, or involvement.



McGee

Buenos Aires

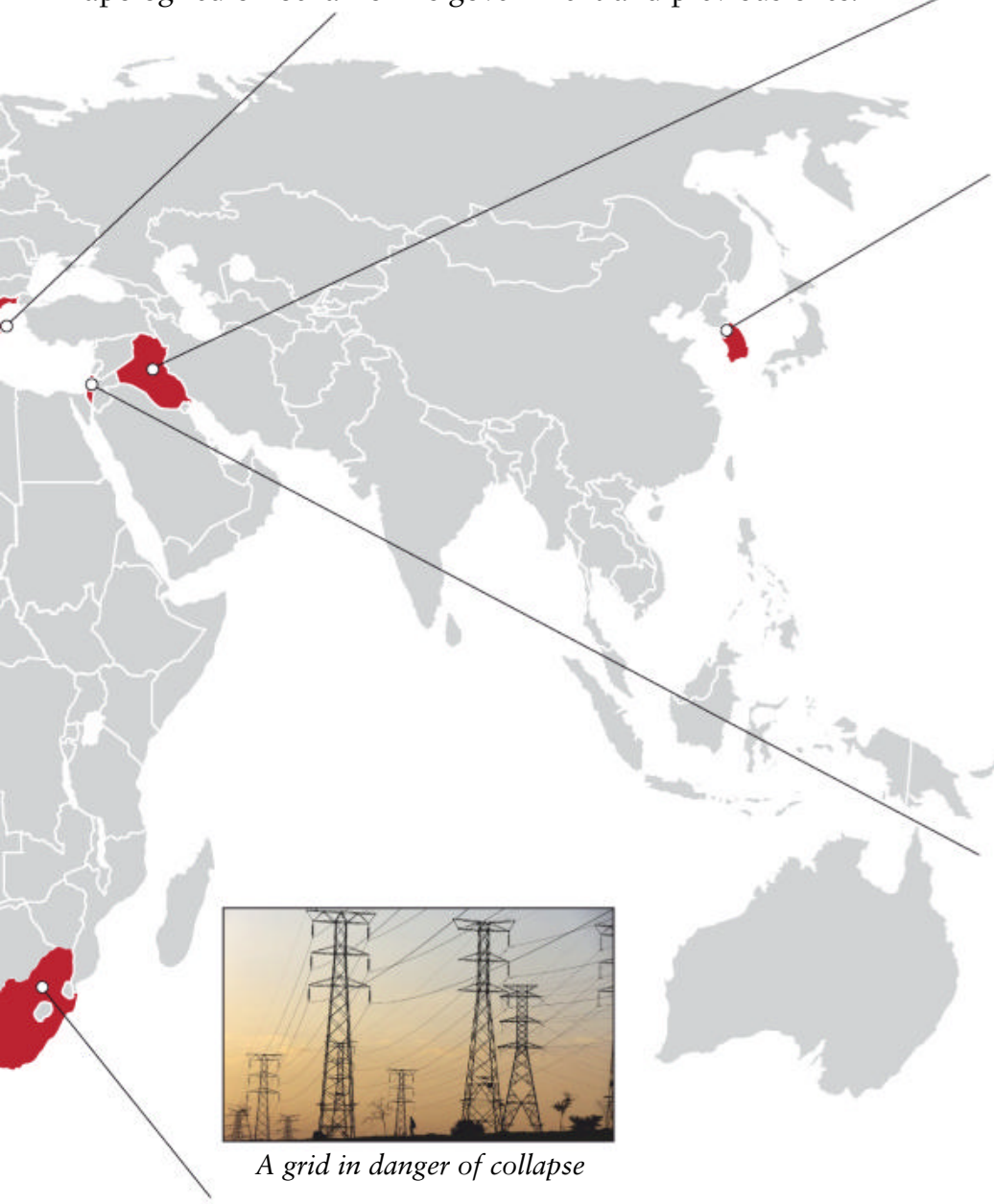
Reclaiming the Falklands: Argentina this week pulled out of a cooperation agreement with the United Kingdom and demanded new talks on the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands, a demand the U.K. rejected out of hand. "The Falkland Islands are British," British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly tweeted. "Islanders have the right to decide their own future—they have chosen to remain a self-governing U.K. overseas territory." The two countries fought a brief war over the archipelago, which sits 300 miles off Argentina's Patagonian coast, after Argentina invaded in 1982. The islands' 3,500 people voted overwhelmingly in 2013 to remain a British territory, and three years later the two countries clinched the cooperation pact, agreeing to disagree over sovereignty while working together on issues around energy, shipping, and fishing rights.

AP, WMBF, Getty, AP

Athens

Throwing petrol bombs

Anger over train crash: Protesters threw Molotov cocktails at police during mass demonstrations in Greece this week as an angry public blamed the government for last week's head-on train crash. Tens of thousands of demonstrators marched in Athens, Thessaloniki, and other cities, chanting "Murderers!" The collision between a northbound passenger train and a southbound freight train killed 57 people, and the stationmaster who directed the trains onto the same track has been charged with negligent homicide. Railway workers, though, blame the sorry state of the rail system, the result of years of underinvestment and understaffing. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis apologized on behalf of his government and previous ones.



A grid in danger of collapse

Johannesburg, South Africa

Who can turn the lights on? South Africa's government created the new post of electricity minister this week to tackle an unprecedented power crisis that is strangling the economy. Electricity Minister Kgosientsho Ramokgopa will take on the mammoth job of upgrading the crumbling power grid, which relies on aging coal-fired power stations, and will try to end corruption at state-run energy giant Eskom. Daily blackouts have become routine for millions of people over the past three months, some lasting up to 15 hours. The outages are costing the economy an estimated $50 million a day in lost productivity as factories and shops are forced to close and even cell phone service goes out. President Cyril Ramaphosa declared a state of disaster last month, and foreign embassies have urged their citizens to stock up on food and water in case the grid collapses.

Baghdad

Austin greets the troops.

Austin visits Iraq: Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin made an unannounced visit to Iraq this week to reassure the Iraqi government that the U.S. would retain a military presence there to help fight ISIS. His visit came just days ahead of the 20th anniversary of the U.S.-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein, caused tens of thousands of civilian deaths, and created instability that fueled the rise of ISIS. The militant group, which once controlled nearly 20,000 square miles of territory, was routed in 2017 but still launches occasional attacks. "We'll continue working to accomplish this mission together," Austin told Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani. The U.S. has 2,500 troops stationed in Iraq, as well as 900 in Syria, in what Austin described as an advisory role supporting the "Iraqi-led fight against terrorism."

Seoul

Deal on forced labor: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol announced a plan this week to end a long-simmering dispute with Japan by providing compensation to South Korean forced laborers. Japan colonized the Korean peninsula from 1910 to 1945 and pressed about 150,000 Koreans into labor during World War II. In 2018, Korea's Supreme Court ordered Japanese companies that had benefited from that labor to pay compensation, but Japan said it had already settled those claims in 1965, and the dispute has soured bilateral relations. Yoon's solution drops the demand that Japan pay. Instead, Seoul will pay victims from a foundation funded by South Korean companies and, it hopes, by voluntary donations from Japanese companies. Victims and their supporters called the plan a "humiliation."

Jerusalem

A protest in Tel Aviv

Soldiers join anti-government protest: Hundreds of Israeli military reservists have begun refusing training to protest the ultra-right government's plan to restrict judicial independence. All but three of the 40 pilots in Israel's elite 69 Squadron said in a letter that they refused to serve a "dictatorial regime." In another letter, some 400 military intelligence reservists rejected an offer by Defense Minister Yoav Gallant to meet, saying they would return to duty only when democracy was fully guaranteed. "This isn't about politics or policy," said jet navigator Omer Denk. "This is about a crisis in trust in a leadership that wants to destroy Israel as a liberal democracy." The proposed judicial reforms would allow a simple parliamentary majority to override Israel's Supreme Court.

Oceans of the world

Underwater parks

Treaty protects marine life: After a decade of negotiations, more than 100 nations reached an agreement this week to protect 30 percent of the world's oceans. The United Nations High Seas Treaty, signed at U.N. headquarters in New York, will allow countries to designate international waters as protected areas for marine life, to preserve species from such threats as overfishing, shipping traffic, and plastic pollution. Damaging activities like oil drilling and deep-sea mining will be banned or limited in those areas, making them into what the Natural Resources Defense Council calls the "ocean's equivalent of a Grand Canyon or Yellowstone National Park." The treaty will take effect once 60 countries have ratified it.

Getty, Reuters, Getty (2), Reuters

People

Blume's long struggle with censors

Judy Blume has helped young readers come of age for more than 50 years, said Amy Weiss-Meyer in *The Atlantic*. Many of her 29 books, which have sold more than 90 million copies, describe puberty-age kids grappling with kissing, sex, breast size, or getting their first period. This has made Blume a favorite target of would-be censors. Last year, the right-wing group Moms for Liberty tried to ban Blume's novel *Forever...* from public-school libraries because it tells of high school seniors who fall in love, have sex, but don't stay together. A Christian group in Texas targeted another Blume novel for mentioning masturbation. Blume has often said that growing up shouldn't be "a dirty subject." Over the decades, she's answered thousands of letters from young readers seeking guidance. The correspondence "took over my life at one point," says Blume. At 85, her focus is on aging, not the teen years: She's done writing books, wears a hearing aid, and runs a bookstore in Key West, Fla., with her husband, George. At a recent doctor's visit, she found out she's a quarter-inch shorter than her lifelong height of 5-foot-4. "I said, 'No!' And yet, I have to tell you, all this year I've been saying to George, 'I feel smaller.' It's such an odd sensation."

The doctor who mails abortion pills

Rebecca Gomperts has gone to extraordinary lengths to help women terminate pregnancies, said Poppy Noor in *The Guardian* (U.K.). A Dutch physician, Gomperts has even parked a boat in international waters outside of countries such as Poland to perform abortions. Her work has become hyper-relevant to Americans since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* last June. "People became much more fearful," Gomperts says. "That is really damaging. It means that when people need to look for care, they are delayed, because they're afraid. And that is a situation that we see everywhere in the world where abortion is really strictly forbidden." In recent years, Gomperts' organization, Aid Access, has shipped the two pills commonly used to end pregnancies—mifepristone and misoprostol—to people in countries where abortion is outlawed. A pending Texas lawsuit could lead to a U.S. ban on mifepristone, but Gomperts' research indicates that misoprostol-only abortions are still 88 percent effective, compared with a 98 percent rate for the two-step regimen. Gomperts advises American women to stockpile mifepristone while they still can. "If you're in a war zone, and the war is coming, you make sure you have enough food in your house," she says. "This is how it feels. It really is a war. It's a war on women."

Why Hilton played dumb

Paris Hilton says her ditzy reality-TV persona was just an act, said Emily Maddick in *Glamour*. "I'm not a dumb blonde," says Hilton, 42, "I'm just very good at pretending to be one." The great-granddaughter of hotel magnate Conrad Hilton, the heiress became a teenage socialite and eventually the star of the reality series *The Simple Life,* which debuted in 2003, the year her sex tape leaked. Soon Hilton's ex-boyfriend sold a longer version of the tape, which made her a global star. "Because of one night, I am going to be judged for the rest of my life," she says. When she meets new people, she says, she worries they already assume she's "a slut." Hilton says the sex tape was particularly painful in light of abuse she suffered as a teenager, including being drugged and raped in her first sexual experience, and enduring forced gynecological examinations at a punitive school for troubled teens in Utah. Her vapid TV character, famous for the catchphrase "That's hot," was a coping mechanism. "I was inspired by Marilyn Monroe, Barbie, and Dolly Parton—blond icons who were definitely playing characters as well," Hilton says. "That just made me not think about any of the bad stuff. It was like a total escape." She's married and a new mom now, and all she wants, says, is to be "normal."

In the news

■ Former Donald Trump adviser **Kellyanne Conway** and her never-Trump husband, **George**, are "in the final stages of an amicable divorce" after 22 years of marriage, they announced last week. Kellyanne, 56, served as Trump's campaign manager in 2016 and held a senior role in the White House, while George, 59, an attorney and Republican fundraiser, became one of Trump's most prominent and relentless conservative critics, calling the 45th president "racist" and mentally ill. Trump labeled George a "husband from hell." In a 2022 memoir, Kellyanne said she considered George's attacks on her boss a betrayal of their marriage, accusing him of "cheating by tweeting." In August 2020, one of their four children posted about her parents' turmoil on social media, and shortly afterward, Kellyanne left the White House and George left his anti-Trump group, the Lincoln Project, so they could spend more time with their children.

■ **Yoko Ono** is leaving New York City to live out her life at her upstate farm, multiple news outlets reported last week. Ono, 90, has spent 50 years living in the Dakota on Manhattan's Upper West Side, where she and her husband, John Lennon, became two of the city's most famous residents. He was shot dead outside the luxury cooperative apartment building in 1980. The Japanese artist and the British pop icon also owned a 600-acre dairy farm in the small town of Franklin, N.Y., where Ono began spending most of her time at the outset of the Covid pandemic. Wheelchair-bound in recent years, Ono reportedly now lives "a peaceful life" out of the spotlight.

■ **Vanessa Bryant** has agreed to a $28.85 million settlement with Los Angeles County over grisly photos shared by firefighters and sheriff's deputies of her husband's and daughter's remains at the site of a 2020 helicopter crash. Retired NBA star Kobe Bryant and 13-year-old daughter Gianna were traveling to a youth basketball game when the helicopter hit a hillside in heavy fog, killing them and seven others. First responders took photos they shared among other deputies and firefighters, their families, and a bartender. The settlement includes the $15 million awarded to Bryant after a jury trial.

Getty, Shutterstock, Reuters

Regulating the Rails

The freight rail industry is facing major safety questions after a hazardous waste spill in East Palestine, Ohio.

How large is the rail industry?

Almost half of all intercity freight transportation and one-third of U.S. exports move by rail, over 140,000 miles of privately owned tracks crisscrossing every state except Hawaii. Trains transport more than two-thirds of shipments of coal, and a major portion of grain, cars, and chemicals. About 4.5 million tons of toxic chemicals are moved by train every year. Every day, an average 12,000 rail cars carry hazardous materials through American towns and cities, including major cities, with a lot of traffic to Pittsburgh, Houston, and Detroit. An estimated 25 million people live in an oil-train blast zone—the one-mile evacuation zone in case of an oil fire. The industry is largely controlled by seven rail corporations that own or operate nearly all of the country's long-distance tracks—down from 63 Class I railroad companies 50 years ago. In the West, Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Santa Fe control the routes, while in the East, it's CSX and Norfolk Southern—the company responsible for the East Palestine incident. Kansas City Southern, Canadian National, and Canadian Pacific traverse the country north to south.

The burn-off of spilled chemicals in East Palestine

Was the East Palestine derailment an anomaly?

The size of the spill and subsequent burn-off received an unusual amount of attention, but derailments occur almost every day. Another Norfolk Southern derailed in Ohio last week, and a train carrying 30,000 gallons of propane derailed in Florida; neither caused a spill. From 1990 to 2021, the Bureau of Transportation Statistics recorded about 54,500 incidents—an average of 1,704 annually—with about 5,500 injuries. Most derailments are minor, with no damage to cars, and overall, the number of them is declining—although Norfolk Southern's accident rate is climbing. Over those 31 years, 131 people, or 4 per year, died as a direct result of derailments. Trucks, which transport the largest percentage of hazardous materials, actually cause far more injuries and deaths.

When are accidents dangerous?

When derailed trains are carrying hazardous materials, as in East Palestine. After that derailment—caused when one car's wheel bearings overheated and burst into flame—Norfolk Southern conducted a controlled burn-off of 1.6 million pounds of vinyl chloride and other toxic chemicals, raising serious, ongoing concerns among residents about possible health impacts. In 2022, hazardous materials were released in about 10 train incidents. Pittsburgh may be particularly vulnerable: up to half of the Bakken shale oil refined on the East Coast passes through the city, and in the past five years, eight trains have derailed in the region, with about 176,000 people living in the one-mile blast zone. "The railroads are playing Russian roulette with Pittsburgh," said Glenn Olcerst, founder of the advocacy group Rail Pollution Protection Pittsburgh. "We are a prime candidate for a major derailment and explosion."

Is the industry heavily regulated?

Thanks to industry lobbying, companies are free to make many of their own safety decisions. In the past two decades, the four largest railroads and their trade association spent more than $480 million on federal lobbying. In 2017, the Trump administration reversed an Obama-era regulation mandating that trains carrying explosive liquids adopt an electronic braking system, which sends the signal to brake to every car at the same time. Most trains rely instead on a Civil War–era braking system that passes the signal through the train one car at a time and can take two minutes to stop a long train. Today's 150-car trains are about 9,000 feet long—more than double the average length in 2017.

What role do train workers play?

A diminished one. Since 2016, rail companies have eliminated almost 60,000 jobs through automation. Under current union rules—there is no federal requirement—most trains have only two workers to monitor trains that stretch for more than a mile. Railroads hope to reduce that to one worker—just the engineer—which the unions say would be dangerous. The industry has also exerted influence on rules about labeling dangerous materials—the highly flammable materials in the East Palestine incident, for example, didn't meet the official definition of a "high-hazard flammable train." In 2020, the Department of Transportation began allowing highly explosive, liquefied natural gas to be shipped by freight trains without additional safety controls. "The Palestine wreck is the tip of the iceberg and a red flag," said Ron Kaminkow, a former Norfolk Southern engineer. "If something is not done, it's going to get worse, and the next derailment could be cataclysmic."

What's the industry's defense?

It denies that it skimps on safety, and points to the overall decline in derailments. The rail companies insist they can ensure safety by relying on automated systems that scan cars and tracks for problems as trains are in motion. But cost cutting is not without risk: From 2016 to 2021, government inspectors found almost 13,000 violations relating to hazardous materials, up about 33 percent from the previous five years. In 2015, Norfolk Southern president James Squires told investors, "We believe that the new braking systems are unjustified from a cost-benefit perspective."

New opportunities for reform

In the wake of East Palestine, the Biden administration, Democrats, and some congressional Republicans are calling for strengthening rail regulations. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg proposed a series of reforms for the railroads, including providing paid sick leave, using new inspection technology alongside—not instead of—human inspections, and alerting emergency response teams anytime hazardous materials are being transported through a state. A bipartisan group of senators led by J.D. Vance (R-Ohio) and Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) last week introduced the Railway Safety Act of 2023. The act would mandate stricter safety requirements for trains transporting hazardous materials and require two-person crews on trains. The new rules would also increase the frequency of inspections, and give rail companies a strong incentive to comply by raising the fine for violations to 1 percent of a railroad's annual operating income. "It shouldn't take a massive railroad disaster for elected officials to put partisanship aside and work together for the people we serve—not corporations like Norfolk Southern," Brown said.

AP

Best columns: The U.S.

The lesson in Lightfoot's loss

Noah Rothman
National Review

Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot will leave the scene with one "historic achievement," said Noah Rothman. She became "the first incumbent mayor in 40 years to lose re-election" in Chicago, which is dominated by the Democratic machine. When Lightfoot took office four years ago, she was celebrated as the city's first Black woman and first gay mayor. But in last week's Democratic primary she finished third with 17 percent, failing "even to secure enough votes to advance to a runoff election." Why? Homicides and crime surged in 2020 and 2021, yet arrest rates "fell off a cliff," as police feuded with Lightfoot and pulled back on enforcement. With street shootings, robberies, and burglaries soaring, many corporations fled Chicago, including Boeing, Tyson Foods, and Citadel. Rampant, organized looting in broad daylight forced Macy's, Banana Republic, and the Gap to shutter stores on the Magnificent Mile. Chicago's teachers union refused to return to schools until January 2022, and the city's children suffered historic drops in math and reading scores, with about a fifth of high school students reading at grade level. In defeat, Lightfoot said that she'd been treated unfairly because of her race and gender—but it's her record that did her in.

Dangerous hysteria over China

Max Boot
The Washington Post

The U.S.'s two political parties may agree on only one major issue, said Max Boot. It's that China is the enemy—and that the U.S. should confront Beijing "with the hardest of hard lines." At a hearing last week by the new House Select Committee on China, both chairman Mike Gallagher (R-Wis.) and ranking minority member Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-Ill.) and all four witnesses described China as such a growing threat that we must wean ourselves off trade, "decouple" our economies, and brace for war over Taiwan. Now, it's absolutely true that Beijing is building up its military with an eye toward invading Taiwan. But the CIA cautions that an invasion is not "inevitable." Continued dialogue and diplomacy may head off a confrontation that could badly damage our economy and trigger "a needless nuclear war." But both Republicans and Democrats are whipping up "hysteria and alarmism." Look at the "unhinged reaction" to the Chinese spy balloon that strong winds evidently blew over the U.S. With tensions "ratcheting up at a dangerous rate," we need "a balanced and nuanced" strategy for dealing with a powerful geopolitical rival, before we stumble into another war like Iraq.

It's not drag if he's straight

Amanda Marcotte
Salon

When is a man dressed in drag not a criminal? asked Amanda Marcotte. When he's an elected Republican official. Last week, Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee "signed a broad law meant to ban drag in public, claiming it's a threat to children." He did so after photos surfaced of Lee cavorting as a high school student in a female cheerleader's short skirt, pearls, and a wig, "in full view of underage people, no less." His drag performance, Lee insisted, was meant to be "lighthearted." Photos emerged of another supporter of criminalizing drag, Republican Texas state Rep. Nate Schatzline, performing in a dress, which he called "a joke for a theater project." Apparently, "their drag doesn't count because they're straight." The breathtaking Republican hypocrisy on moral matters is no mere "gotcha"—it's deeply revealing. Consider the right-wing, anti-abortion reality TV star Jessa Duggar Seewald, who recently announced that doctors terminated her pregnancy—but insisted it was *not* an abortion, because she was miscarrying. But in red states, scared doctors have denied the same care to many other women with failing pregnancies. Abortion laws, like drag laws, will be selectively enforced against people "who want to make personal choices that Republicans don't like."

Viewpoint

"What if Mike Pence had said yes? What if he had done exactly what Trump demanded: block the certification of the 2020 election or even overturn the result entirely and purport to award the presidency to Trump? In that moment, American peace and unity depended on the force of will of one person, a man who stood up to a president, to the lawmakers in his own party who challenged the election, and to the howling mob that was crying out for his head. And where are we now? Has the fever passed? Not by a long shot. America is in the grips of a simply staggering amount of partisan animosity."

David French in The New York Times

It must be true... I read it in the tabloids

■ The National Park Service issued some unusual advice for visitors fleeing a bear attack: "Never push a slower friend down," the service tweeted, "even if you feel the friendship has run its course." The tweet prompted hundreds of comments, including one from a user asking what someone should do if *you* are the slower friend. "Check in on the friendship before you head to the woods," the NPS advised.

■ A Chinese company is selling a remote kissing device with silicone lips that allows long-distance lovers to share virtual smooches. The $38 device, which connects to a smartphone, uses sensors to mimic the pressure and movement of the kisser's lips. Inventor Jiang Zhongli said he was inspired by a long-distance relationship with a girlfriend. He's selling about 100 of the devices per month, with mixed reviews. "It is a genius invention," said one commenter, "but where's the tongue?"

■ Motorists have crashed into an ordinary stop sign pole in the parking lot of a Walmart in Auburn, Maine, at least 130 times. "It's a weird phenomenon," said Auburn Fire Chief Robert Chase, who says his department has responded to "an inordinate amount of emergencies there." The accident magnet is now the subject of a five-minute YouTube documentary, and a Facebook group documenting the crashes has more than 8,000 followers. People are driving to the pole to pose for selfies. One theory, joked Auburn Police Chief Jason Moen, is that "the pole marks a focal point in the Earth's gravitational pull which causes vehicles to inherently veer into it."

Taobao

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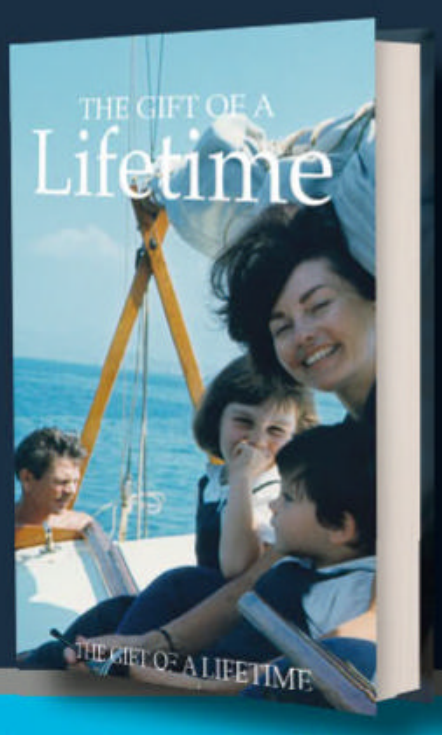

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FRANCE

The U.K.'s successor in Europe

Simon Kuper
Financial Times (U.K.)

France may be the biggest beneficiary of Brexit, said Simon Kuper. When the U.K. was still in the European Union, London was the natural site for international companies looking for a European headquarters, because it was a global financial center with an English-speaking elite. But now that Britain is no longer an EU member, Paris is the first choice, and France is getting the foreign direct investment that the U.K. once did. The changes are palpable. The city that just two decades ago still felt like "the capital of the 19th century" is now "eating into London's big lead in banking and tech." Paris has far more high-speed train routes than London and is building nearly 200,000 new suburban homes. And at long last, the French elite finally deign to speak English—witness President Emmanuel Macron and his "practically bilingual" cabinet ministers. That means France is benefiting not just financially, but also diplomatically, reaping increased clout on the world stage. In the old days, Washington phoned London first in a crisis. But now the British, "afflicted by uncharacteristic political instability" and without an EU seat, are far less useful to the Americans. "I'm going to offend both countries, but France is becoming the new Britain."

ITALY

How many more migrants will drown?

Carlo Bonini
La Repubblica

Dozens of people are dead because Italian authorities chose to treat a desperate boatful of migrants as a security threat rather than a rescue operation, said Carlo Bonini. The migrant boat that capsized last month just off the Calabrian coast carried nearly 200 men, women, and children, and only about 80 of them survived. These families, many of them Afghans fleeing the brutality of the Taliban regime, "were sentenced to death by a security bureaucracy that is turning the Mediterranean Sea into a cemetery." Italian authorities working for Frontex, the European Union's border security agency, "bureaucratically baptized" the vessel as unrecognized and then decided it was safely above the waterline. When they did deploy rescue craft, their boats could not handle the stormy conditions and had to retreat. No one even thought of sending two larger vessels that the Italian Coast Guard had at its disposal. Italy's right-wing Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi has tried to shift blame onto what he called the "irresponsibility" of the victims for their decision to attempt the journey from Turkey in bad weather, "as if the voyage were a risky cruise by wealthy yachtsmen." Isn't a sea rescue always supposed to be the responsibility of the state? "Woe to the shipwrecked," because this Italy led by the ultra-right "will have no mercy on them."

Germany: Where's that promised military buildup?

It's been a year since German Chancellor Olaf Scholz pledged to completely overhaul the German armed forces, said **Ben Knight** in ***Deutsche Welle***, but so far, "not much has happened." The Russian invasion of Ukraine was a seismic event for Germany, knocking elites from all parties out of their complacency. Just three days after Russia attacked, Scholz gave a stirring speech calling the event a *Zeitenwende*, or epochal turning point, in German history. Promising that Germany would henceforth finally meet NATO's yearly defense-spending goal of 2 percent of GDP, he said his government would also borrow $106 billion for a "massive, one-off" cash infusion to the military to make up for decades of underspending. A year on, though, inflation and interest payments on the loan have left only about half the sum available for actual hardware, and nothing has yet been purchased. The procurement process, already maddeningly inefficient, has been slowed further by greedy lawmakers pushing for military contracts in their regions. Perhaps a year "isn't enough" for Scholz to turn around "the colossal ocean tanker" that is the bureaucracy of the German military.

Scholz inspecting anti-aircraft artillery

Getty

When he made that speech, Scholz assumed that Ukraine would fall "and that the Russian army would be at the Polish border within days," said **Frank Specht** in ***Handelsblatt***. Instead, the Ukrainians stopped the Russian advance. So in the intervening year, rather than beefing up its own military, Germany shoveled weapons and equipment to Ukraine. We started gingerly at first, offering just helmets, but over the months we began sending self-propelled howitzers, rocket launchers, artillery, anti-aircraft missiles, and, most recently, tanks. The result is that we have actually depleted our own armed forces. At this point, if Germany were suddenly attacked, we would "have to stop fighting after just a few days for lack of ammunition."

The real progress has been made in transforming not our military, but our mindset, said **Michael Herl** in the ***Frankfurter Rundschau***. Living for decades in the shadow of our violent past, and secure under the American defense umbrella, Germans thought "we had developed some kind of immunity" to war. We "called that miracle cure pacifism." But Russia's war has demonstrated that "simply not participating may not be enough." Now, even former conscientious objectors are feeling a new kind of patriotism, realizing that the idea of Germany "isn't just a reason to get drunk every four years" at the World Cup, but something worth actually fighting for.

Germany has certainly changed its rhetoric, said ***Le Monde*** (France) in an editorial, but we haven't seen enough yet to know whether it will actually start punching at its weight. Scholz did wean his country off dependence on Russian gas, and "that's quite a feat." But will he take responsibility for defending NATO's eastern flank? And what about EU defense policy—will Germany finally become the partner France needs? Scholz did well to acknowledge the historical turning point last year. But he has yet to "live up to the expectations he raised."

Iran: A dangerous escalation toward nuclear capability

Iran is mere inches away "from having the bomb," said **Yves Bourdillon** in *Les Echo*s (France). Two weeks ago, U.N. inspectors with the International Atomic Energy Agency detected a tiny bit of uranium in Iran enriched to the "unprecedented" level of 84 percent purity, "just below the level generally considered necessary to produce an atomic bomb." The particles were discovered by chance, during a rare random visit by the IAEA, when an astute inspector noticed a change in the pipe connections at Iran's underground Fordow plant and took a sample. Ever since the Trump administration in 2019 pulled the U.S. out of the Obama-era Iran nuclear deal, which had limited Iranian enrichment to less than 4 percent, Tehran has "gradually been freeing itself from its restrictions." This is extraordinarily destabilizing, because the U.S. and Israel are not likely to sit back and watch Iran go nuclear. One or both might even attempt a pre-emptive strike on Iranian facilities. But while an attack might be able to blow up the centrifuges, it won't "destroy the expertise that Iran now has."

Grossi meets Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi.

Let's not get ahead of ourselves, said **Andrew England** and **Najmeh Bozorgmehr** in the *Financial Times* (U.K.). Just a week ago, CIA Director William Burns said his agency did not believe that Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, had decided to resume pursuit of nuclear weapons. Yes, Iran did begin ramping up its nuclear capabilities after the U.S. under Trump "imposed waves of crippling sanctions." Tehran was open about boosting its uranium enrichment to 60 percent purity and building advanced centrifuges. Yet it's not clear whether the new, more highly enriched particles that the IAEA found "were part of a deliberate plan by Iran to increase its enrichment" even further, or were instead "created accidentally"—the regime says the pipes were connected in error. Even so, IAEA head Rafael Grossi was alarmed enough to rush to Tehran this week. He got the regime to agree to reinstall cameras and other monitoring equipment that it had removed last year.

Such pledges "are laughable," said **Baria Alamuddin** in *Arab News* (Saudi Arabia). "Within hours" of Grossi's departure, Iranian officials had already begun walking back the promise to restore the cameras. The truth is, "the regime's current state of non-cooperation with the IAEA means that we simply don't know what Iran is doing at its nuclear sites." Does it have the capability to make enough material for a bomb in just 12 days, as at least one Pentagon official has said? Will we "awaken one morning to discover that Iran has tested a nuclear bomb capable of wiping out entire cities"? That would be a tipping point, said **Markus Kaim** in *Der Spiegel* (Germany). If Iran goes nuclear, then its enemies in the region—notably Saudi Arabia, and possibly Egypt and Turkey as well—will likely seek atomic arsenals of their own. The resulting "nuclear arms race" will make no country safer. But a pre-emptive strike on Iran would mean war in the Middle East right now, a war that could well draw in more and more countries. The next great world conflict may "already be brewing."

TURKEY

The glorious heritage lost to the quakes

Justin Marozzi
The National (UAE)

The earthquakes that struck Turkey and Syria last month not only destroyed thousands of lives, said Justin Marozzi, but also devastated the region's rich architectural heritage. The monuments and mosques damaged include precious examples of Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman history, and while the loss of life is always felt most deeply, "the loss of cultural patrimony also leaves deep wounds." The 2,000-year-old castle from Roman times that once loomed magnificently over the Turkish city of Gaziantep now lies in ruins, and so does the 17th-century Sirvani Mosque nearby. At least half of Antakya, the ancient city once known as Antioch, was destroyed, while in Diyarbakir, another UNESCO World Heritage site, many buildings collapsed. Perhaps it shouldn't be a shock: Modern Turkey can't build earthquake-resistant buildings to keep its residents safe, after all, much less shore up its ancient monuments. And with Syria racked by war, architectural conservation there seems a "quaint irrelevance." Turkey is used to rebuilding, of course. The Yeni Mosque in Malatya rose from the rubble twice, after earthquakes in 1894 and 1964. Still, the sight of all these new ruins is a sad reminder that life in this region is always vulnerable to the next temblor.

MEXICO

Corrupt cop poisoned U.S. against us

Stephanie Henaro
El Economista

The revelation that Mexico's top law enforcement official was working for the Sinaloa drug cartel has poisoned the U.S.-Mexico relationship, said Stephanie Henaro. Genaro García Luna was convicted last month in a New York court of taking millions of dollars in bribes. As head of Mexico's equivalent of the FBI, García Luna worked hand in hand with the DEA and other U.S. officials for years, ostensibly cracking down on the cartels yet actually helping Sinaloa annihilate its rivals. His conviction has torpedoed cooperation between the two countries' governments, and now Mexico "is shaping up to be the piñata" for all sides to whack at in the next U.S. presidential election. Two Republicans in Congress have proposed a shocking bill that would allow the U.S. Army to fight the cartels on Mexican territory, and former Attorney General William Barr endorsed it last week in the venerated pages of *The Wall Street Journal*. Even current Attorney General Merrick Garland "is grabbing the bat to hit the Mexican piñata." He said last week that he was open to designating Mexican drug cartels as foreign terrorist groups, which would make them fair game for U.S. attack. The consequences of García Luna's betrayal of Mexico could yet harm us all.

Getty

Talking points

Noted

■ New York City is now spending nearly $5 million a day to house and feed migrants, including tens of thousands who were bused there from the border by the Republican governors of Texas and Arizona. Caring for migrants will cost the city some $4.2 billion in this fiscal year and the next, and Mayor Eric Adams is asking the White House for federal aid.
New York Post

■ The FBI issued a record 11,500 seizure orders for guns bought by people who later flunked background checks in 2020 and 2021. A huge surge in gun-buying during the pandemic created long delays in background checks, and under the law, licensed dealers can go ahead with weapons sales if the checks are not completed within three days.
USA Today

■ Carbon dioxide emissions reached a record high of 36.8 gigatons last year. The rebound of air travel and driving from a pandemic lull and a growth in coal-fueled power plants helped drive a 1 percent increase over 2021, but a boom in renewable energy and electric vehicles largely offset the greater use of fossil fuels.
CNBC.com

■ At least 14 states have introduced various proposals this year to restore voting rights to convicted felons, according to the Brennan Center for Justice. More than 4.6 million Americans are currently unable to vote because of felony convictions.
Associated Press

Child labor: The exploitation of migrants

A 14-year-old working in Florida

The 13-year-old girl came from an impoverished highland town in Guatemala—part of an exodus of 250,000 or so unaccompanied migrant children who have entered America over the past two years. She crossed the border in 2021 and reunited with her mother, who'd found a grueling job at a Grand Island, Neb., meatpacking plant. Last summer, the girl started working there, too. Alongside dozens of other children, she made $19 an hour helping clean the "kill floor" and sinks of blood and fat, suffering blisters, burns, and open wounds from caustic cleaning chemicals. Since federal authorities raided the plant in October, she "has watched her whole life unravel," said **Maria Sacchetti** and **Lauren Kaori Gurley** in ***The Washington Post***. Her stepfather has been jailed and her mother faces criminal charges for enabling a minor to work. "All I keep thinking is: 'How did this happen?'" said Labor Department investigator Shannon Rebolledo. "How did no one say anything?'"

Bureaucratic negligence helped produce this "Dickensian" nightmare, said the ***San Antonio Express-News*** in an editorial. The Biden administration promised a humane change from Donald Trump's border policies and exempted unaccompanied child migrants from immediate expulsion. But with the number of kids tripling since 2017, the administration "cut back reviews" that ensured safe placements, a recent *New York Times* investigation found. "The result was disastrous." The Department of Health and Human Services has lost track of some 85,000 children. Two-thirds of unaccompanied children are estimated to be working full-time, including in dangerous jobs in slaughterhouses, automobile factories, sawmills, and construction sites. "It is almost unimaginable this is happening in this country in the 21st century."

Child labor proves that there is "no such thing as benign neglect of the U.S. border," said **Michael Brendan Dougherty** in ***National Review***. Out of "a misguided idea of humanitarianism," liberals have turned tens of thousands of kids into virtual slaves and easy prey for human traffickers. The White House last week created a task force to go after rule-breakers, but "simply prosecuting employers" won't solve the problem, said **Linda Chavez** in ***The Bulwark***. These kids fled poverty and violence in Central America, and they remain vulnerable and desperate for money. "We lack the procedures, resources, and political will" to protect them, and "it's easier to just look away."

Covid's origins: Still no 'smoking gun'

Republicans have already decided that the Covid-19 pandemic was caused by a virus that escaped from a lab in Wuhan, China, said **Hayes Brown** in ***MSNBC.com***. So it was with great jubilation that they seized on a new Department of Energy analysis that supports the lab-leak theory. You can expect Republicans to claim the DOE assessment is a game-changer when they launch House subcommittee hearings this week into the origins of Covid. But the DOE's assessment isn't "the smoking gun" Republicans wish it to be. Based on new intelligence, the DOE made its judgment with "low confidence," joining the FBI in concluding that the virus most likely leaked from a Chinese lab. Most scientists and four other U.S. intelligence agencies who've studied the outbreak support an alternative theory—that SARS-CoV-2 is a natural bat virus that jumped species in the animals caged at a Wuhan wet market, and then infected humans there. For Republicans, though, the lab-leak theory is far more appealing, because it enables them to blame a conspiracy "for the fear, death, and chaos of 2020."

Yes, the intelligence community is divided, said ***National Review*** in an editorial. But the DOE's change of tune is comeuppance for liberals who from the outset "decried the lab-leak theory as unscientific and racist." It seems like a glaring coincidence that Covid emerged not far from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, which is known to study coronaviruses. The virus' origin should have been a matter for serious public discussion, said **Ted Galen Carpenter** in ***The American Conservative***. But reactionary liberals who insisted anything Donald Trump said couldn't possibly be true "smothered that debate."

The lab-leak theory remains nothing but "talk," with zero evidence behind it, said **Jonathan M. Katz** in his ***Substack*** newsletter. Incredibly, the new DOE analysis shifts the possible source of a leak to a different lab in Wuhan rather than the Institute for Virology—"a completely different scenario." Meanwhile, the evidence for the wet market theory is strong: All the first Covid cases, scientists have found, were clustered like a bull's-eye around the wet market, and investigators who swabbed surfaces found the virus there. A jump from animals is how "nearly every other viral epidemic in human history began," including the Spanish flu, AIDS, Ebola, and SARS in 2003. The simplest, most obvious explanation may be less exciting—but it's most likely to be true.

Kirsten Luce/The New York Times/Redux, AP

Murdaugh: Privilege succumbs to justice

"Justice was served," said **Kathleen Parker** in ***The Washington Post***, but Alex Murdaugh's trial almost ended "very differently." Last week, the South Carolina lawyer was convicted of murdering his wife and 22-year-old son, Paul, and sentenced to life in prison. It was "the longest criminal trial in South Carolina history," riveting the country and marking the end "of the nearly 100-year legal reign of the Murdaugh family in the state's 14th Circuit." The family was mired in scandal: Murdaugh stole millions from his clients; Paul was charged with drunkenly causing the accidental death of a 19-year-old girl in a boat crash; and after a housekeeper died on the family property, Murdaugh stole her family's $4.3 million insurance payout. The jury reached a verdict in under three hours, but he might have gotten off but for two critical turning points. The first was a video taken by Paul moments before his death, proving that Murdaugh lied about leaving the murder scene. The second was the dismissal of a juror who allegedly told people, "He's not guilty." Otherwise, there might have been a hung jury.

Murdaugh: Done in by his late son's video

Millions of Americans followed the trial, said **Amanda Marcotte** in ***Salon***, and not just because of the crime's lurid nature. This case resonated because "white male privilege" was on trial along with the defendant. Murdaugh himself testified, and tried to "bullshit his way" out of his obvious guilt. In a "cinematic" turn, the trial was presided over by Judge Clifton Newman—"a Black son of a domestic worker"—who told Murdaugh at sentencing that for the rest of his life, "you have to see Paul and Maggie when you're attempting to go to sleep." What a comedown for a man whose family had dominated "Murdaugh country" going back to his great-grandfather, said **Emma Brockes** in ***The Guardian***. Murdaugh is "the embodiment of what happens when people are cushioned over generations from the consequences of their own actions."

His conviction also signals "the end of an era," said **David Lauderdale** in ***The Charlotte Observer***. The trial provided "one of the harshest looks at the ills of humankind that will ever seep out of the South Carolina Lowcountry." Everyone believed the family was "untouchable," but when the "guilty" verdicts were read, and the handcuffs clicked on Murdaugh's wrists, it proved that "no one is above the law."

Reverse racism: Are whites the real victims?

Dilbert cartoonist Scott Adams argues that Black people are the real racists, said **Lucian K. Truscott IV** in ***Salon***, and an alarming number of white people seem to agree. In a recent YouTube "rant" calling for resegregating society, Adams, 65, claimed he had proof of "so-called reverse racism": just 53 percent of Black respondents to a recent poll agreed with a statement popularized by far-right extremists on a 4chan internet group: "It's ok to be white." The reluctance of Black people to endorse this statement makes them a "hate group," Adams said, urging his fellow whites to "just get the hell away." Hundreds of newspapers responded by dropping Adams' once popular workplace satire. But Adams is hardly alone in claiming that white people "are the victims of racism, not Black people"—that sentiment got Donald Trump elected president in 2016, and fills Fox News' airwaves every day.

Adams has exposed America's "bizarre double standard" on the subject of race, said **Wilfred Reilly** in ***National Review***. Imagine that "a witty Black cartoonist" said "most American whites are at least a bit racist," and so Black folks "have no choice but to view whites as dangerous." There would be no outcry; indeed, it's now commonplace for hip progressive journalists to accuse "whites *en bloc* of being violent threats." If Americans really want to have an "honest conversation" about race, we should discuss the fact that federal statistics show that of the roughly 600,000 documented violent crimes in the U.S. involving Blacks and whites, 90 percent "involved a Black perp and a white victim." That should be "fair game."

It's also fair game to discuss why most Black people are still stuck in impoverished neighborhoods, said **Charles M. Blow** in ***The New York Times***. In recent years, statistics show, white flight has left 80 percent of major metropolitan regions "more segregated as of 2019 than they were in 1990." As a result, black schoolkids attend underfunded urban schools and have a much lower chance of going to college—and even when they do, their white peers accumulate an average of "seven times more wealth." The continuing reality of actual racism never penetrates the right-wing "echo chamber," said **Philip Bump** in ***The Washington Post***. There, the consequences Adams is suffering only reinforce the "white victimhood" narrative: "Here's another White man, punished for his views."

AP

Wit & Wisdom

"The story of the human race is war. Except for brief and precarious interludes, there has never been peace in the world, and before history began, murderous strife was universal and unending."
Winston Churchill, quoted in Commentary

"Nothing is as permanent as a temporary government program."
Milton Friedman, quoted in Slate

"If you really look closely, most overnight successes took a long time."
Steve Jobs, quoted in Dataquest (India)

"Always behave the way you want your children to behave."
Emily Post, quoted in Inc.

"Virtue is the attempt to pierce the veil of selfish consciousness and join the world as it really is."
Iris Murdoch, quoted in The New York Times

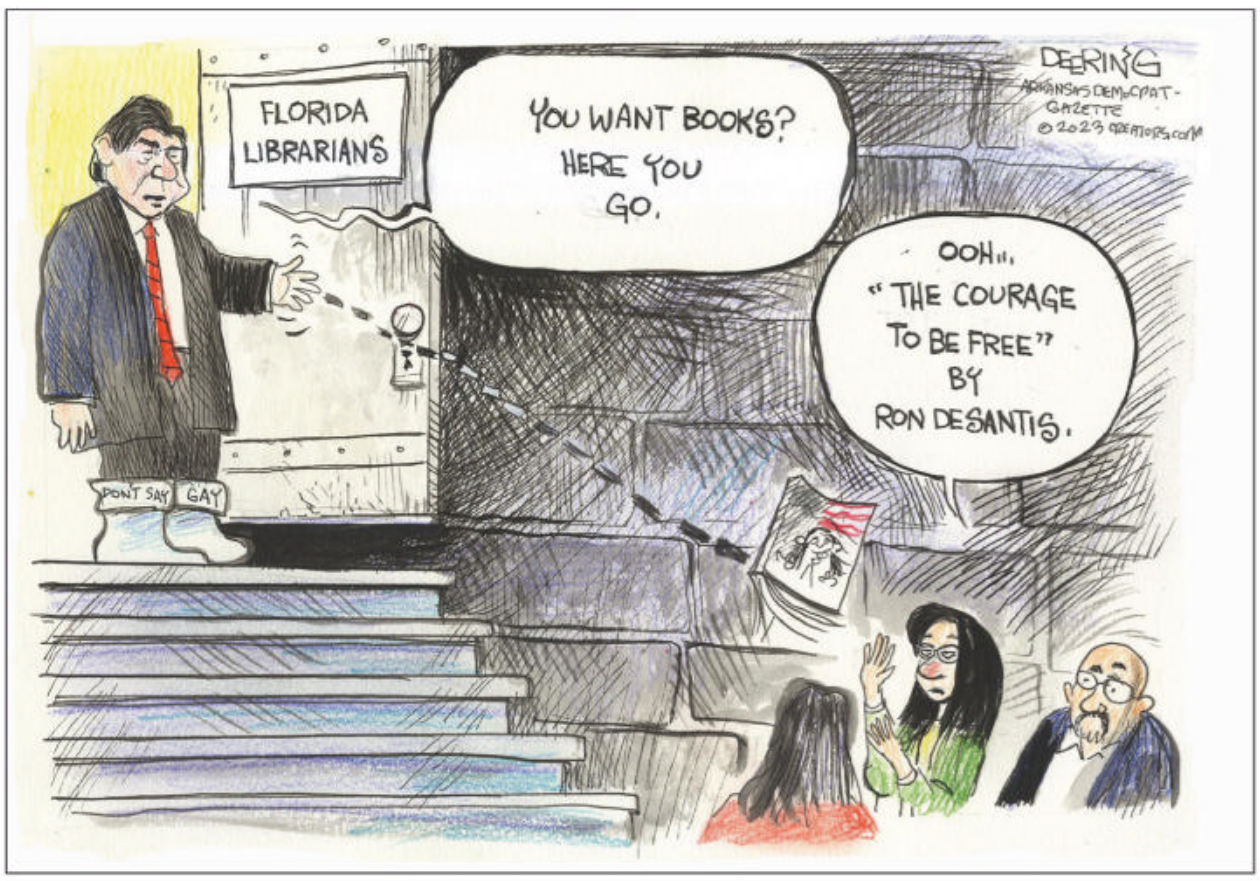
"Live not for battles won. Live not for the-end-of-the-song. Live in the along."
Gwendolyn Brooks, quoted in the Los Angeles Review of Books

"I always feel it's not wise to violate rules until you know how to observe them."
T.S. Eliot, quoted in The Athletic

Poll watch

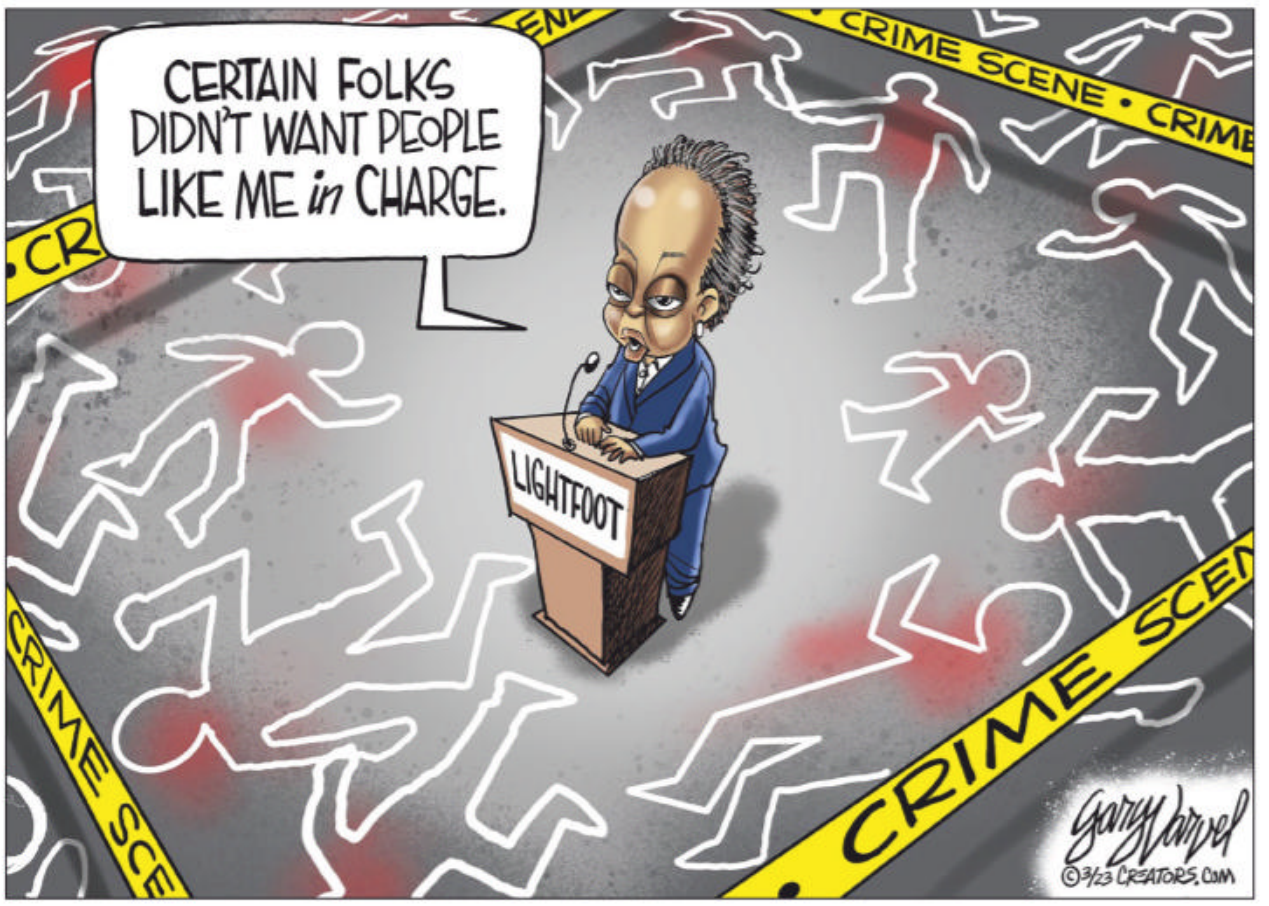
■ A record-high **51%** of Americans, including **72%** of Republicans and **42%** of Democrats, now believe the coronavirus leaked from a Chinese lab. Just **18%** believe the virus was transmitted from animals to humans, while **31%** remain undecided. **28%** of Democrats believe the pandemic had natural origins, down 11 points from late February. Meanwhile, just **8%** of Republicans believe the natural transmission theory, representing a 6-point drop.
Morning Consult

Pick of the week's cartoons



For more political cartoons, visit: www.theweek.com/cartoons.

Pick of the week's cartoons



Regulation: Who's responsible when AI goes awry?

AI can be thoroughly convincing yet 100% wrong.

Powerful new chatbots and other recent AI technologies are like "a runaway train that we're chasing on foot," said computer scientist **Cynthia Rudin** in ***The Hill***. Billions of dollars are "pouring into AI technology that generates realistic images and text, with essentially no good controls on who generates what." The tech companies creating them "don't appear to care about how their products impact—or even wreck—our society." Venture capitalists happily compare the emergence of AI to the launch of the internet; it could just as easily become "like launching a nuclear bomb on the truth." Yet few on Capitol Hill seem in any rush to act. Rep. Ted Lieu (D-Calif.) had the right idea when he proposed that a dedicated government agency needs to regulate AI. We need to demand strict government guardrails before we get "a dangerous avalanche of misinformation."

"My own experience using Microsoft's ChatGPT puts misinformation at between 5 to 10 percent," said **Parmy Olson** in ***Bloomberg***. That's conservative, and it matches others' experience. CBS's *60 Minutes* asked ChatGPT where correspondent Lesley Stahl—a 20-year veteran of the network—worked. The answer: NBC. Commercial pressures are pushing Big Tech to take this technology to a wider audience well before it's ready. "The problem is that most lawmakers do not even know what AI is," said **Cecilia Kang** and **Adam Satariano** in ***The New York Times***. Washington has yet to produce a single bill "to thwart the development" of AI's "dangerous aspects," while previous efforts "to curb AI applications like facial recognition" have "withered." We are seeing a pattern here, with Washington "taking a hands-off stance" even as technology "outstrips U.S. rule-making and regulation."

The one thing that may get tech companies to move cautiously is liability, said **Will Oremus** and **Cristiano Lima** in ***The Washington Post***. Tech platforms are largely spared liability for content posted on their sites by the set of communications rules known as Section 230. Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch has already posited that the "protections that shield social networks" wouldn't apply to a "polemic" generated by AI. That could expose tech companies like Google or Microsoft to lawsuits for false or libelous results. If we do nothing to change current laws, then critics of tech "will get what they have long desired: cracks in the shield," said **Matt Perault** in ***Lawfare***. What we need is legislation that can balance technological progress with social protection, and won't "cripple large language models with lawsuits and court fees." The reality, unfortunately, is that gridlock makes it likely that instead Congress will "stand still" and leave the lead on making rules for AI to the courts.

Innovation of the week

A new stand-alone gadget connects any smartphone to a satellite network for out-of-range texts, said Umar Shakir in *The Verge*. Satellite connectivity for phones is all the rage after Apple debuted its Emergency SOS feature with the iPhone 14 last fall. Now British rugged electronics maker Bullitt "is stuffing trendy emergency-response satellite tech into a Motorola-branded Bluetooth keychain accessory." The new $99 Motorola Defy Satellite Link connects to geostationary satellites; unlike Apple's SOS feature, it allows text messaging in addition to the emergency SOS beacon. In case your phone is dead, the keychain has a physical "check-in button" that can send a simple SOS and location information. Service is not cheap: a $149 annual bundle gets you 30 messages each month.

Bytes: What's new in tech

Advertisers flee from Twitter

Data from Twitter insiders confirms a dramatic decline in Twitter advertising since Elon Musk completed his takeover of the social network, said Alexander Saeddy in *The Wall Street Journal*. Twitter's revenue for December was 40 percent lower than the numbers for December 2021. The large drop in sales and adjusted earnings stemmed from the fallout "after many advertisers ditched the social-media platform" following Musk's contentious arrival. Twitter took in $1.57 billion in the fourth quarter of 2021, and "advertising represented 90 percent" of its business. According to the research firm Sensor Tower, "more than 70 of Twitter's top 100 advertisers from before Musk's takeover weren't spending on the platform" at the end of February.

Nintendo looks for a next act

Has Nintendo finally hit "peak Switch," asked Gearoid Reidy in *Bloomberg*? Six years after its debut, sales of Nintendo's mainstay gaming console are falling. Nintendo sold 29 million Switch devices in the pandemic year of 2020, but recently "cut its outlook for the year ending March to 18 million units after a disappointing 2022 holiday season." The gaming giant's "profits and share price have been tightly connected with the cyclical popularity of Nintendo's consoles." While many outsiders expected Nintendo to go all in on phone games, Nintendo stuck with consoles—a counterintuitive strategy that gave it $10 billion in profit. The Switch now accounts for roughly 95 percent of Nintendo's revenue. Unlike with previous cycles, though, this time there is "no sign of a successor."

Russia tries for a homebuilt phone

Russia plans to produce 100,000 of its own smartphones and tablets by the end of the year, said Masha Borak in *Wired*. Increasingly isolated after its invasion of Ukraine, Russia has "doubled down on its efforts to achieve technology self-sufficiency" and hopes to jump-start a new smartphone built by Russia's National Computer Corporation. Any Russian firm will have trouble licensing Google's Android, so Russia is hoping to get its own "national operating system" up and running. Other Russian phones, like the Yotaphone, have not had much success in the domestic market because "Russians prefer brands they already know." Apple and Samsung pulled their business out of Russia last year but remain available thanks to "parallel trading," or importing goods through the gray market.

Getty

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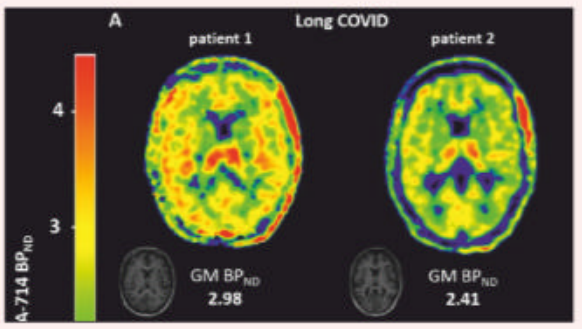
Long Covid as a neuroimmune disease

When Covid first emerged, doctors treated it as a respiratory virus that primarily affects the lungs. But there is mounting evidence that long Covid—characterized by symptoms such as difficulty with memory, attention, sleep, and mood that linger for months or years after an initial infection—is in fact a neurological disorder, reports *Scientific American*. Because the symptoms persist even after no virus is detectable, the most likely explanation is inflammation in the brain. Several studies of long Covid patients with neurological symptoms show increased immune system activity in the central nervous system, and one showed immune-related abnormalities in patients' cerebrospinal fluid. In some cases, macrophages, immune cells from blood vessel walls, could be seen to have migrated to the brain, where they were not supposed to be, and where they caused general inflammation. "It's almost like blanket bombing," says Avindra Nath, a neurologist at the National Institutes of Health. "It ends up causing a lot of damage. And they're very hard to shut down, so they persist for a long time." At least 16 million adults in the U.S. are thought to suffer from long Covid, and determining how exactly their brains are affected will be crucial in developing treatments. But this will be a lengthy process, says Nisha Viswanathan, director of UCLA's long Covid clinic. "We're going to be addressing this for probably decades."



Inflammation: Healthy brains are mostly blue.

Coral in Panama: Where the good algae is

Can algae save coral reefs?

There's now hope that some corals will survive the warming of Earth's oceans, reports *The Washington Post*. Corals have a symbiotic relationship with the algae they harbor. The algae donate their energy from photosynthesis to the corals in the form of sugars, and when the algae die in too-warm water, the corals bleach. But a new study shows that certain algae are better able to withstand the heat. When researchers looked at data from the Uva Island reef in Panama, which suffered several heat waves between 1980 and 2018, they found that the reefs that hosted more algae from the species *Durusdinium glynnii* were healthier than those that had different algae species. As warming continued, some reefs actually changed the algae they hosted to prefer *D. glynnii*, in a phenomenon known as "symbiont shuffling." The researchers' climate models now predict that those reefs could survive through the 2060s—good news given that earlier studies predicted a world without reefs well before that. "While we don't think that most reefs will be able to survive in this way," says senior author Andrew Baker, from the University of Miami, "it does suggest that vestiges of our current reefs may persist for longer than we previously thought."

Test mpox patients for HIV

Mpox, the virus formerly known as monkeypox, is rarely fatal in healthy people. But new research shows that in people with advanced HIV, the mpox virus is often deadly. Researchers tracked 382 adults across 28 countries who harbored both infections. They found that those with low CD4 cell counts—a marker of how much HIV has affected the immune system—were more likely to suffer from severe mpox illness, with a death rate of about 15 percent. In those with the lowest counts, it was almost 30 percent. The nature of the disease was also different, with large lesions appearing all over the body rather than just smaller ones at the site of exposure. But HIV-positive people with healthy CD4 levels, whose viral load was less or was being kept in check with antiretroviral drugs, appeared to have a similar prognosis to the HIV-negative. "Everyone with mpox should be tested for HIV," lead author Chloe Orkin, from Queen Mary University of London, tells *The Guardian* (U.K.). "If you know someone who is vacillating about getting a test, encourage them."

Souring on erythritol

The popular sweetener erythritol appears to increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. Erythritol is a low-calorie sugar alcohol that occurs naturally in some fruits and vegetables and is often used to sweeten keto foods, sometimes paired with stevia (such as under the brand Truvia) or monkfruit. In a new study, researchers looked at data from more than 4,000 people in the U.S. and Europe and found that the 25 percent with the highest levels of erythritol in their blood were twice as likely to suffer heart attack and stroke as the lowest quartile. The team cautions that more research is needed, not least because the study participants had a relatively high prevalence of cardiovascular disease. But they say these initial findings raise concerns, particularly given the increasing presence of the sweetener in our foods. Sales for products containing erythritol grew 43 percent from 2020 to 2022. "I normally don't get up on a pedestal and sound the alarm," study leader Stanley Hazen, from the Cleveland Clinic, tells *CNN.com*. "But this is something that I think we need to be looking at carefully."

PFAS chemicals in wildlife

What do polar bears in the Arctic have in common with plankton in the Pacific, cardinals in Atlanta, and crocodiles in South Africa? The answer, says *The New York Times*, is that they have all been contaminated with the "forever chemicals" known as PFAS. That's the conclusion of a new study into the spread of the chemicals, which are used in thousands of everyday products such as nonstick cookware and waterproof clothing, and which have been linked to cancers, developmental problems, and other health issues. To assess the prevalence in wildlife, researchers looked at more than 100 studies from around the world. They found that PFAS had been discovered in hundreds of species, including scorpions, pandas, turtles, horses, wild boar, otters, and oysters. "We were like, 'Holy smokes, this is shocking,'" says senior author David Andrews, from the nonprofit Environmental Working Group. While it is unclear how exactly PFAS chemicals affect plants and animals, Andrews says, the toxins are "likely serving as an additional stressor" on top of habitat loss, climate change, and other pressures.

No hiding from PFAS

Alamy, Getty

Review of reviews: Books

Book of the week

The Great Displacement: Climate Change and the Next American Migration

by Jake Bittle

(Simon & Schuster, $29)

"It sometimes feels too pat to call a book 'necessary,' but this one really is," said **Michael Schaub** in ***NPR.org***. In *The Great Displacement*, journalist Jake Bittle travels America to tell the stories of communities that have already been destroyed or remade by events tied to climate change. In California wine country, we meet a couple who rebuilt their home after a 2017 wildfire only to realize their neighborhood had largely been abandoned. In the Florida Keys, which Bittle says may be fully submerged by 2100, we hear from a farmer who lost his fruit grove in a hurricane he barely survived. In Houston, we encounter flood-displaced residents who were moved to low-lying territory only to be flooded out again. Quickly, Bittle proves to be a storyteller of great empathy, "but also one with a real gift for explaining the fraught issues—

A Florida couple surveys Hurricane Irma's toll.

economic, scientific, political—that make the climate crisis and its effect so complex."

Bittle's approach makes the threat of climate change palpably real, said **M.R. O'Connor** in ***Mother Jones***. Bittle estimates that 20 million Americans will be displaced by climate change's effects by the end of the century, but his focus on individual communities enables him to combine "propulsive" accounts of weather disasters along with wrenching anecdotes about survivors' experience of the aftermath. The tales of sorrow "can begin to feel relentless." But you can't read this book and deny that climate change is already pummeling many U.S. communities and exposing weaknesses in our disaster-relief systems and insurance and housing markets that make the suffering worse. Bittle also helps us imagine what he calls "a new American geography," one in which our inland cities grow while coastal towns wash away, drought-stricken developments are abandoned, and wildfire-prone communities lie in ashes.

Though nature keeps sending us weather calamities, "we keep hitting snooze on these persistent alarm bells, acting as if we have plenty of time before permanent damage is done," said **Cory Oldweiler** in ***The Boston Globe***. Clearly, "our time is up." Still, even the "common-sense" mitigation measures that Bittle proposes feel like political non-starters for now. We need plans for housing people displaced by climate-related crises, but can't solve the affordable housing shortage we already have. We also need more flexibility in the provision of federal relief aid. Climate deniers can argue against action all they want. "The planet is well past caring whether pandering politicians want to play ball. The alarm bells are ringing. We need to wake up."

Novel of the week

Homestead

by Melinda Moustakis

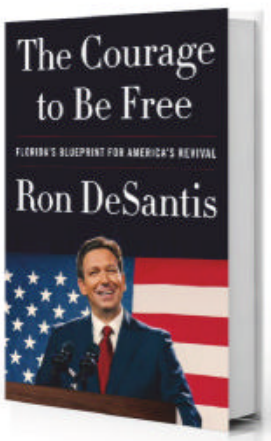
(Flatiron, $28)

Like its setting, Melinda Moustakis' debut novel is "luminous and fierce," said **Anne Valente** in ***The Chicago Review of Books***. The year is 1956, and Korean War veteran Lawrence has just claimed 150 untamed acres in the Alaskan wilderness, intending to clear the land, build a home, and raise crops. He meets and swiftly proposes to 18-year-old Marie, who shares his desire to stake a claim in the world but is less withdrawn. As the couple's story unfolds over three difficult years, "Moustakis' language is spare and exquisite, tough and lovely," said **Claire Luchette** in ***The New York Times***. "The sentences build on themselves, becoming expansive and staggering in their sweep." Tested by cold, want, wolves, pregnancy, and competing desires, Marie and Lawrence slowly build something lasting and meaningful in one corner of the vastest canvas. "How small a life is, how uninspiring, when we examine it alongside earth and sky. But in a gulp of cherry wine, a bonfire, and a birth, Moustakis finds magnificence in the smallness."

AP

The Courage to Be Free: Florida's Blueprint for America's Revival

by Ron DeSantis (Broadside, $35)



"Who actually *is* Ron DeSantis?" asked **Andrew Egger** in ***The Dispatch***. The Florida governor remains "somewhat elusive" as a personality even as he has emerged as the most formidable potential challenger to Donald Trump for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination. So it's disappointing that DeSantis' best-selling new memoir, "even by the standards of campaign autobiographies," turns out to be "highly parsimonious" with details about the author's early life and political formation. It does mention he was raised in a blue-collar Florida home and played baseball at Yale. But it devotes most of its energy to attacking elites. On that score, the book "manages to stand out for pure venom."

The book makes DeSantis' political character easy to read, said **Chris Lehmann** in ***The Nation***. "At virtually every inflection point in his public career, the same underlying refrain emerges: *I was driven to adopt draconian measures because the Left made me do it.*" Many of the actions he boasts of are "chilling," said **Jennifer Szalai** in ***The New York Times***. In his four years as Florida's chief executive, he has outlawed classroom discussion of sexual orientation through third grade and restricted how race and gender are discussed in private businesses, which "looks an awful lot like thought policing." Because the book is aimed less at voters than at the Republican donor class, DeSantis also makes clear that businesses can trust that he wouldn't be a president who'd impose stiff taxes or regulations.

He comes across as "wildly self-confident, but also dour," said **Barton Swaim** in ***The Wall Street Journal***. "A line or two may approach something like humor, but I did not detect a proper joke." Still, GOP primary voters may connect with the focused rage he delivers in this so-called memoir, which is "better thought of as a manifesto on the folly of nearly everything our academic and political experts have been saying for the past quarter-century." Its tone, said **Manuel Roig-Franzia** in ***The Washington Post***, "foreshadows what would surely be an irascible campaign."

The Book List

Best books…chosen by Liam Callanan

In Liam Callanan's new novel, When in Rome, *an American weighs taking up with an old flame versus joining an Italian convent. Below, the author of the best-seller* Paris by the Book *recommends six other books set in Italy's Eternal City.*

Rome and a Villa by Eleanor Clark (1950). Eleanor Clark went to Rome to write a novel and came back with this ethereal book instead. It's part travelogue, part history, part memoir, and altogether wonderful. When you're in Rome, she writes, "you walk close to your dreams"—a line I found so resonant to my own experience, I used it for the epigraph of my new novel.

Four Seasons in Rome: On Twins, Insomnia, and the Biggest Funeral in the History of the World by Anthony Doerr (2007). Doerr, too, went to Rome to write a novel—which turned out to be his 2014 Pulitzer Prize–winning *All the Light We Cannot See*. He also returned with this charming account of navigating the Eternal City with his wife and their months-old twin bambini.

Lost Hearts in Italy by Andrea Lee (2006). As it begins, Andrea Lee's novel finds heroine Mira "in the dangerous company of words," picking through memories of an affair that entangled her when she first moved to Italy with her now former husband. The story is an unsparing examination of race, class, gender, and Italian society.

The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories edited by Jhumpa Lahiri (2019). A collection of greats, too many of which are too little known outside Italy. Don't miss Ennio Flaiano's "A Martian in Rome," which pokes as much fun at Romans as it does at the eponymous Martian, who reportedly "is happy to be living in Rome, where life is undoubtedly better than in every other city on the planet."

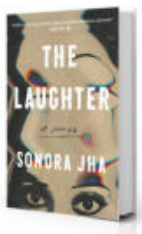
Blue Guide Rome by Alta Macadam and Annabel Barber (2020). This is a regularly updated guidebook that's as exuberantly impractical—the latest edition clocks in at 703 pages of densely printed prose—as it is glorious. Award yourself a doctorate in Roman Studies when you close the final page.

Beautiful Ruins by Jess Walter (2012). The production of Joseph L. Mankiewicz's (in)famous 1963 movie, *Cleopatra*, starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton and shot in Rome, launches this unabashedly romantic novel across decades and continents. Hide your credit card while reading or risk booking a real-life trip to Italy before you finish.

Also of interest...in love and desire

The Laughter

by Sonora Jha (HarperVia, $28)



"To say *The Laughter* is just a campus novel is to vastly undersell it," said Rafael Frumkin in *The New York Times*. Narrated by a white professor who lusts after a younger Pakistani peer, the book "captures the clueless voice of a privileged man to intense comic effect." But as our narrator feigns solidarity with protesting students who want the curriculum decolonized, Jha creates "hair-raising suspense" in scene after scene, each one "infused with the anxieties of a democracy on the brink of collapse."

Couplets

by Maggie Millner (FSG, $25)

Maggie Millner's debut work tells an unconventional love story in unconventional style, said Kristen Millares Young in *The Washington Post*. It unfolds as a series of poems in which the narrator recounts betraying her dull boyfriend by jumping into an affair with a woman in Brooklyn's BDSM community. "Sound different? It is, and I am glad." Millner's kinky tale "transcends the tawdry." Besides, "don't you tire of reading what is essentially the same book, again and again?"

Big Swiss

by Jen Beagin (Scribner, $27)

The protagonist of Jen Beagin's "daring" new novel "loves to sabotage her way through life," said Madeleine Connors in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. Working as a transcriptionist for a sex therapist, she becomes obsessed with the confessions of a female patient she nicknames Big Swiss. Unwisely, she initiates an affair with Swiss without revealing what she knows. For all its mordant humor, the novel also proves "satisfyingly dirty" and, in the best way, "perhaps a little deranged."

Wanting edited by Margot Kahn and Kelly McMasters (Catapult, $18)

Wanting is "the only literary essay collection I've encountered that I could accurately describe as a page-turner," said Nicole Graev Lipson in the *Chicago Review of Books*. Thirty-three women write about their experiences of desire, with the objects of their yearnings ranging from sex to a particular SUV. "What sets *Wanting* apart is how uniformly artful these essays are: insightful and poetic, thought-provoking and stirring. They do what all great essays do: make space for complication."

Author of the week

Lloyd Devereux Richards

BookTok has a new poster child, and he's a retired 74-year-old Vermont lawyer, said **Kyle Melnick** in ***The Washington Post***. Lloyd Devereux Richards hadn't even heard of TikTok when his daughter, Marguerite, asked last month if she could post a video of him to boost sales of the crime thriller he had finished writing more than a decade earlier. *Stone Maidens* had sold only a few dozen copies when it was published in 2012 by an Amazon subsidiary. But his daughter's 16-second video went viral, gathering 1 million views overnight and rocketing *Stone Maidens* to the No. 1 slot on Amazon's best-seller list. Apparently, viewers were moved by Marguerite's framing: She showed a scruffy-haired Lloyd in his writing attic, used a version of John Lennon's "Beautiful Boy" as a soundtrack, and emphasized how he'd put 14 years into the novel while working full-time and raising a family.

Lloyd Richards didn't stop writing in 2012, said **Brittany Bowker** in ***The Boston Globe***. *Stone Maidens* features a female FBI agent who's trying to catch an Indiana serial killer, and Richards finished a sequel just last fall. At that point, finding a publisher appeared unlikely. Today, he's in negotiation with publishers about that book, and his agent is talking to Hollywood studios about movie deals. He owes it all to his daughter, of course, and to a platform whose power he still doesn't fully understand. "I'm still dumbfounded," he says. "It's like a dream." He's also inspired by the young readers he's hearing from. "It warms my heart that 18- to 24-year-olds are enjoying this book," he says. "I think it's a tremendously hopeful sign that young people love to read books."

Patrick Manning, Marguerite Richards

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Review of reviews: Music & Home Media

Morgan Wallen
One Thing at a Time

★★½☆

Morgan Wallen has returned with a 36-song album, "and unfortunately, it's damn good," said **Nicholas Hautman** in the ***New York Post***. The pop-country star didn't try very hard to make amends when a camera caught him drunkenly uttering the N-word in 2021, the same year his album *Dangerous* began a nearly uninterrupted two-year run in *Billboard*'s top 10. But Wallen shows "an admirable sense of self-awareness here." The 29-year-old "wastes no time acknowledging his flaws," including his weakness for drink, and "man, does his story make for one hell of an album." Three dozen songs is too many, though, and Wallen "seems to have lost a great deal of energy as a singer," said **Sam Sodomsky** in ***Pitchfork***. A few pared-down tunes "accentuate his gift for delivering tugging, bittersweet pop melodies." But there are 49 co-writers credited here, and it's "kind of a slog" to listen to all of this record's boozy mea culpas and "microwaved" Southern rock. Wallen's "focus group" approach produces "a ton of uninspired retreads and some truly generic filler."

Kali Uchis
Red Moon in Venus

★★★½

Time to dim the lights and spark some candles, said **Jem Aswad** in ***Variety***. Kali Uchis' "lush" third album is focused on romance, and while the Colombian-American singer's music continues to swirl together elements of R&B, neo-soul, Latin pop, and hip-hop, *Red Moon in Venus* specializes in sultry mood pieces. "It's a lavish, luscious hot tub of an album, conjuring visions of plush feather beds, fluffy pillows, and bubble baths." Uchis' take on romance "isn't all sunshine and roses," said **Maura Johnston** in ***Rolling Stone***. The 28-year-old issues cutting kiss-offs in "Hasta Cuando" and "Moral Conscience." Her "full-spectrum approach to songcraft" also results in "a wholly satisfying examination of emotionalism in its many forms—romantic, carnal, self-preserving." Though this record doesn't have the swagger or stylistic variety of 2018's *Isolation*, "it's engaging from start to finish," said **Andy Kellman** in ***AllMusic***. Even when Uchis is largely limiting herself to "supple slow jams" and "celestial ballads," she "somehow displays as much charisma and vocal elasticity as ever."

De La Soul
3 Feet High and Rising

★★★★

De La Soul's music is finally streaming, said **Ben Sisario** in ***The New York Times***. The influential rap trio from Long Island, N.Y., "all but created the subgenre of alternative hip-hop." In 1989, as gangster rap was beginning to dominate the genre, De La Soul took "an unapologetically nerdy approach to rapping" and broke ground with "an eclectic, freewheeling sampling style." Sadly, the scores of samples on each album led to copyright conflicts that rendered the group's landmark work inaccessible on streaming services. "All this has finally been rectified," said **Oliver Wang** in ***NPR.org***. The core trio—Posdnuos, Maseo, and the late Trugoy the Dove, who died in February—spent a year and a half sifting through their first six albums and re-recording certain snippets. Start with their "consistently irreverent" 1989 debut, which "still sounds wondrous and weird." Peppered with mirthful skits and brimming with Afrocentric positivity, it's "a proof of concept that the right combination of ingenuity and frivolity could create something indelibly, impossibly hip."

New and notable podcasts

The Coldest Case in Laramie
(Serial/New York Times)

Though the latest *Serial* podcast doesn't solve a murder, "it does demonstrate how an insistent desire for answers can lead us so very far away from the truth," said **Laura Miller** in ***Slate***. In 1985, college student Shelli Wiley was fatally stabbed in her Laramie, Wyo., apartment, which was set on fire. Many close to Wiley believed the culprit was a neighbor, ex-cop Fred Lamb, who in 2016 was charged before the case against him was dropped. Seeking answers, reporter and former Laramie resident Kim Barker returned to the city and secured a "stunning" level of access. Yet what she uncovers only makes the case murkier. "Barker is excellent: dogged but fair," said **Miranda Sawyer** in ***The Guardian***. "The podcast becomes a story about memory and how human recall—even of such a shocking event—is never as accurate as we think. It's a gripping but subtle listen that exposes the biases, hopes and assumptions that everyone brings to a case such as this. No amount of evidence can help with that."

The Witch Trials of J.K. Rowling
(Free Press)

"Novelist J.K. Rowling is back in the news, where, apparently, she longs to be," said **Mary McNamara** in the ***Los Angeles Times***. Weeks after boycott calls greeted the video game *Hogwarts Legacy*, the *Harry Potter* author is participating in a new podcast focused on her views about transgender women and the storm those views have caused. The podcast's title is "certainly a suggestive indication of whose side host Megan Phelps-Roper is on," and the first episode includes a "rather breathy" recounting of how Rowling overcame an abusive marriage and transformed herself into a global literary star. Apparently, Rowling will stand by the statements that sparked fans' backlash, including that allowing men to declare themselves women is a threat to women born with uteruses. "*Potter* apostates should at least try listening without prejudice," said **Patricia Nicol** in ***The Times*** (U.K.). Phelps-Roper scored a coup by persuading Rowling to speak, and the series' "finely crafted" first episodes at least hint that Rowling may be open to a slight rethink.

Let's Make a Rom-Com
(CBC Podcasts)

Writing a good romantic comedy is harder than it looks, said **Alexis Soloski** in ***The New York Times***. Reviving the format of their previous hit podcast, *Let's Make a Sci-Fi*, comedians Mark Chavez, Ryan Beil, and Maddy Kelly have switched genres to attempt crafting a ready-for-Hollywood love story. As they consult rom-com experts, dissect common tropes such as the meet-cute and the airport chase, and spitball goofy story ideas, the hosts treat the project with respect and sincerity. "Or as much sincerity as people who knowingly pitch ideas like *Spybrarian*, *1-900 SANTA*, and *Love Bermuda Triangle* can muster." From the start, "you're pulled along for a ride," and you stay with it even after the hosts collectively decide the plot will concern a woman who begins dating a man whose most recent ex is actress Salma Hayek, said **Nicholas Quah** in ***NYMag.com***. "It's quite something to hear a pitch idea so roughly found and sketched out," and to realize how much teamwork will be required to turn the premise into a full-blown screenplay.

Google

Malware is increasingly threatening online security

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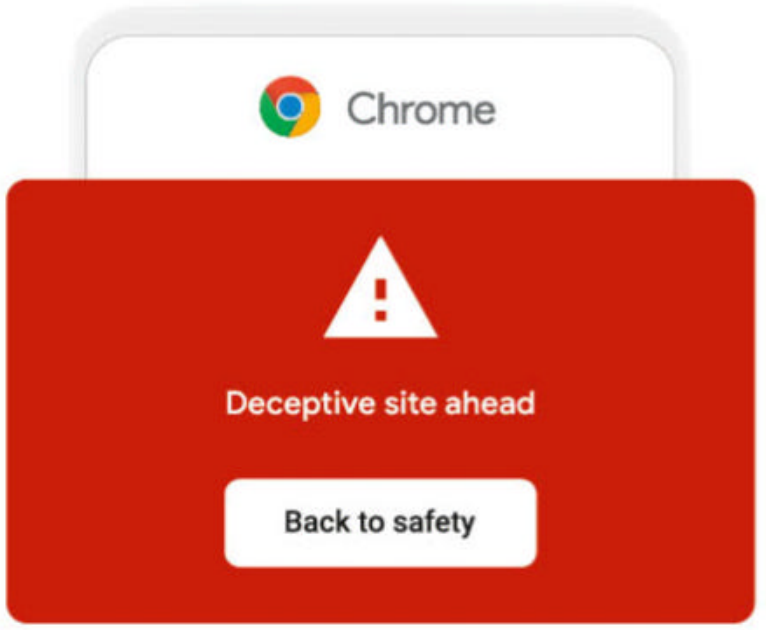

As threats from malware increase, Google Safe Browsing makes the internet safer by showing warnings to users when they attempt to navigate to dangerous sites or download dangerous files.

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Review of reviews: Film

The Quiet Girl

Directed by Colm Bairéad
(PG-13)
★★★★
A neglected child blossoms under two strangers' care.

Ireland's contender for the Best International Film Oscar is "as beautiful as it is devastating," said **Odie Henderson** in ***The Boston Globe***. In 1981, a neglected 9-year-old is sent by her impoverished parents to spend the summer with relatives—a childless couple with a dairy farm. Though young Cáit, who's played by newcomer Catherine Clinch, remains silent and withdrawn even as she is afforded loving attention for the first time, "Clinch's superb acting lets us see how she is changing for the better." The movie's adult co-stars are equally fine, said **Nick Schager** in ***The Daily Beast***. As Cáit's new surrogate mother, Carrie Crowley "radiates the sort of immediate love that only comes from great, painful need." Andrew Bennett, in turn, gives the man of the house a surface gruffness owed to a deep shared grief. As these three wounded people each draw rejuvenating strength from one another, Colm Bairéad's delicate Irish-language drama "speaks volumes without raising its voice." An adaptation of *Foster*, a Claire Keegan novella, *The Quiet Girl* "has the feel of one of those gemlike short stories in which nothing much happens, but crystalline realizations result from ordinary acts," said **Kyle Smith** in ***The Wall Street Journal***. Because we watch events unfold as Cáit sees them, Bairéad's film is "consistently fascinating." It also "has a lightness in its heart," and a simple but exhilarating climactic scene "elegantly ties a bow around the whole picture." *(In select theaters)*

Crowley and Clinch: A nourishing bond

Linoleum

Directed by Colin West
(Not rated)
★★★½
A science educator builds a DIY rocket ship.

Halfway into Act One, the enigmatic new indie film starring Jim Gaffigan "appears poised to detour into familiar quirky comedy territory," said **Joe Leydon** in ***Variety***. Gaffigan plays Cameron Edwin, a TV science show host who's in danger of losing his job and his wife when space debris falls from the sky and inspires him to try to defeat his midlife crisis by building a personal spacecraft. But writer-director Colin West is positioning viewers for a moment when he'll "yank first the rug and then the floor from underneath our feet." However much patience you feel obliged to extend to him "will be amply rewarded." Rhea Seehorn at first seems wasted in the role of a nagging, unhappy, and brilliant wife, said **Noel Murray** in the ***Los Angeles Times***. Likewise, the time given to the bond that forms between Cameron's teen daughter and the son of Cameron's look-alike neighbor and rival feels wasted. Even when we're questioning *Linoleum*, though, we at least have Gaffigan, whose "everyman presence and seeker's soul make him a great vessel for big ideas." He makes Edwin and his space-travel dream "look poignant, not silly." Surreal details begin multiplying as the story gradually darkens, said **Jeannette Catsoulis** in ***The New York Times***. Finally, "just when we're wondering where all this is going," West "executes a final act as devilish as it is emotionally potent." *(In select theaters)*

Midlife seekers Gaffigan and Seehorn

Chris Rock's slapback: Did the comedian go too far?

"Turns out, Chris Rock is still really angry at Will and Jada Pinkett-Smith," said **Eric Deggans** in ***NPR.org***. Last weekend, when the 58-year-old comedian finally addressed "The Slap" during a live standup special on Netflix, he unloaded "a deluge of expletives and bile." He turned to the topic only in the final minutes of the overhyped, moderately entertaining performance. But when he did, he argued that Will Smith walloped him on stage during last year's Oscars broadcast not over a joke but to compensate for an unrelated humiliation: that Jada had engaged in an affair with a much younger man and Will had been widely scorned for publicly accepting it. "Everybody called that man a bitch," Rock said. "And who's he hit? Me! A n---- he knows he can beat. That's some bitch-ass shit!"

Rock's use of the b-word didn't stop, said **Stephanie Holland** in ***The Root***. Despite the heat he's previously taken for making Black women the butts of his jokes, he used the slur several times to refer to Jada, all while blaming her exercise of sexual agency for his beef with Will. "Even if he's angry about being hit on national television, airing the couple's dirty laundry during a Netflix special feels exceptionally petty," said **Danielle Ryan** in ***Slashfilm***. The Smiths have spoken candidly about their open marriage, yet Rock chose to attack their character, going for "the lowest of blows whenever possible." His diatribe was "honestly kind of sad," coming from such a sharp comedic mind. "It wasn't funny, it was just a man trying to work out his demons in front of millions of people."

Rock on stage in 'Selective Outrage'

"This was a side of him you hadn't seen before," said **Jason Zinoman** in ***The New York Times***. As a stand-up performer, Rock has always exhibited "a meticulous sense of control," and his mastery of the form is evident through much of *Selective Outrage*. When he turns to the Smiths, "he's out for blood." You can see that Rock's anger dates back years, at least to when Jada publicly urged him to decline hosting the 2016 Oscars because no Black actors were nominated for top awards. Rock's "messy, emotional" counterpunch was "the most riveting material in an uneven hour."

Break Out Pictures, Shout! Factory, Netflix

Google

Digital attacks are being used to censor critical information online

Project Shield was built to defend journalists, human rights organizations, and more from these attacks

Human rights groups, news organizations, and more are at risk of DDoS attacks designed to suppress the free flow of information. Project Shield protects these websites from censorship attempts so they can continue providing vital services and publishing newsworthy information.

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Television

Streaming tips

More lives of the artists...

All the Beauty and the Bloodshed
Photographer Nan Goldin, always a risk-taker, put her career on the line when she decided to shame museums into exposing the role played by a family of major art patrons in fueling America's opioid crisis. Laura Poitras' Oscar-nominated documentary, available March 19, offers a stirring portrait of the artist. *HBO Max*

Ursula von Rydingsvard: Into Her Own
Von Rydingsvard builds huge wooden sculptures that appear at once organic and otherworldly. To watch her at work in her Brooklyn studio is a reward in itself. Better is also hearing her describe how the work emerges from a life that began in World War II refugee camps. *Tubi*

Pat Steir: Artist
Steir was an abstract artist at a time when women weren't thought to possess "the gene." Following Steir, now in her 80s, as she develops her "waterfall" paintings, is biography as poetry. *Roku*

Carlos Almaraz: Playing With Fire
Almaraz, a seminal figure in the Chicano art movement, is celebrated in a sweeping biographical portrait that laments his death at 48 and highlights his unique ability to capture the light and dark of 1970s–'80s Los Angeles. *Netflix*

Lifeline: Clyfford Still
Seen alongside the work of other great abstract painters, Still's paintings stand out. This documentary explains why he's sometimes overlooked. *$3 on Vudu*

M.C. Escher: Journey to Infinity
More than just the creator of trippy architectural visions, Escher was a genius of an artist who managed to tap into the soul of mathematics, as this documentary shows. *$3 on Amazon Prime*

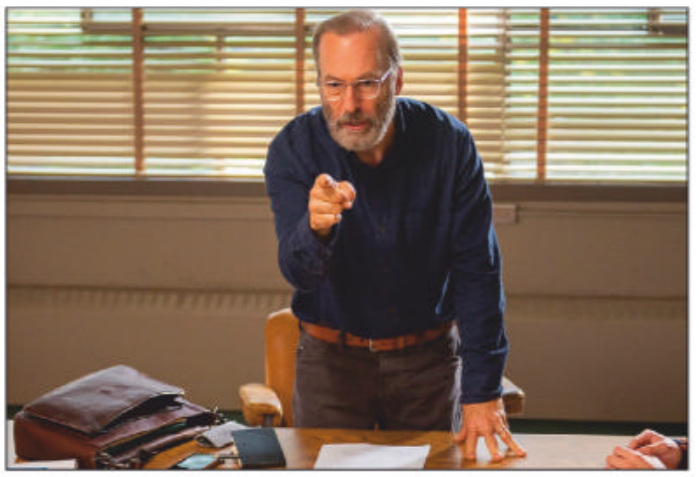
The Week's guide to what's worth watching

Shadow and Bone
Shadow and Bone isn't just another teen fantasy series. Clever writing and a magnetic performance from Jessie Mei Li set it apart and honor the popular young-adult novels it's based on. In the show's second season, Li's Alina Starkov, a young "sun summoner," will journey in search of two mythical creatures whose power she will need to harness if she hopes to defeat an army of shadows. *Available Thursday, March 16, Netflix*

Boston Strangler
In 1962, fear gripped Boston as one woman after another was found raped and strangled by an unknown perpetrator. But the hunt for the Boston Strangler didn't begin in earnest until two female journalists began writing about the murders. In this new feature-length thriller, Keira Knightley and Carrie Coon co-star as Loretta McLaughlin and Jean Cole, journalists who fought sexism in law enforcement and in the newsroom to bring the crime spree to the public's attention. *Available Friday, March 17, Hulu*

Extrapolations
Climate change is already altering our world. This new star-packed drama series imagines how bad things might get during the years 2037 through 2070, and how our collective response might alter the outcome. Meryl Streep, Marion Cotillard, Forest Whitaker, Daveed Diggs, Edward Norton, Keri Russell, Tobey Maguire, and many other top actors appear in eight interwoven stories about characters who contribute to the crisis or to creating solutions. Scott Z. Burns, the screenwriter of *Contagion*, heads the project. *Debuts Friday, March 17, Apple TV+*

Swarm
Fans can get a little crazy. In this new horror thriller series co-created by Donald Glover and playwright Janine Nabers, Dominique Fishback (*Judas and the Black Messiah*) is riveting as a "Killer Bee," one of the millions of faceless devotees of a Beyoncé-like pop superstar. Speak poorly of the queen and this acolyte can turn violent. With Chloe Bailey and Damson Idris. *Available Friday, March 17, Amazon Prime*



Odenkirk in 'Lucky Hank': A likable jerk

Lucky Hank
Better Call Saul's Bob Odenkirk returns to a more comic mode in this new series based on the Richard Russo novel *Straight Man*. Odenkirk is a delight as the cranky, cynical, smart, and spiritually lost chair of the English department at a mediocre Pennsylvania liberal arts college. His misanthropy puts him at constant risk of blowing up the cocoon he's built for himself, especially now that every student carries a smartphone. *Sunday, March 19, at 9 p.m., AMC*

Other highlights

Money Shot: The Pornhub Story
A documentary traces the rise of the mammoth pornography website and investigates charges that the site profits from nonconsensual videos and human trafficking. *Available Wednesday, March 15, Netflix*

Agent Elvis
Matthew McConaughey voices Elvis Presley in a new animated comedy-adventure series that casts the King of Rock 'n' Roll as a secret agent. With Don Cheadle and Priscilla Presley in co-starring voice roles. *Debuts Friday, March 17, Netflix*

Marie Antoinette
All the gilt, none of the guilt. France's fanciest queen is back in a new drama series that views her through a feminist lens. German actress Emilia Schüle stars. *Sunday, March 19, at 10 p.m., PBS; check local listings*

An old friend tests Ted's leadership style.

Show of the week

Ted Lasso
If Ted Lasso has taught us anything, it's that optimism wins, both at the Emmys and on the pitch. Like Ted, the small-time football coach from Kansas who won over the players and fans of English soccer also-rans AFC Richmond, the show has ridden cheery belief to unlikely critical and popular success. As a third and expected final season begins, Jason Sudeikis' title character has led the team to promotion to the Premier League. But are they destined to be humbled? Whatever happens, expect the series to go out, in Ted's words, "like Willie Nelson—on a high." *Debuts Wednesday, March 15, Apple TV+*

AMC, Apple TV

• *All listings are Eastern Time.*

Fried chicken with saffron honey: An American classic enhanced

The recipe below weds influences from a handful of cultures, said Homa Dashtaki in *Yogurt & Whey: Recipes of an Iranian Immigrant Life* (W.W. Norton). It's an "all-American fried chicken," except with yogurt replacing buttermilk in the tenderizing marinade and the flavors enhanced by Aleppo pepper and saffron honey.

Plan ahead, because the chicken needs at least a four-hour marinade, and the saffron honey needs at least an eight-hour infusion. Any leftover saffron honey will keep for at least 6 months and is wonderful on buttered toast.

Peppery, sweet, and oh so crispy

Recipe of the week

Yogurt-marinated fried chicken with saffron honey

2/3 cup mild-flavored honey (such as clover)
1/8 tsp saffron threads
2 cups plain whole milk yogurt
3 tbsp minced garlic (about 8 cloves)
3 tsp kosher salt, divided
1 (3-lb) chicken, cut into 8 pieces, or any 8 bone-in, skin-on chicken parts
3 cups peanut or canola oil (or enough to fill a 12-inch skillet one-third of the way)
2½ cups all-purpose flour
1 tbsp Aleppo pepper, more or less
½ tsp freshly ground black pepper

Pour the honey into a heatproof glass measuring cup and heat in microwave until runny but not boiling, about 45 seconds. Crush saffron threads between your fingertips as you add them to honey, then stir well. Cover and leave at room temperature for at least 8 hours or overnight.

To make the marinade, stir yogurt, garlic, and 1 tsp salt together in a wide, shallow dish (such as a 9-inch x 13-inch baking pan). Add chicken and turn to coat thoroughly. Cover and refrigerate for at least 4 hours or up to overnight.

Remove chicken from refrigerator 1 hour before cooking so it can come to room temperature. Set up 2 cooling racks with baking sheets under them.

Pour oil into a 12-inch cast-iron skillet and heat over medium until oil reaches 375 on a candy thermometer.

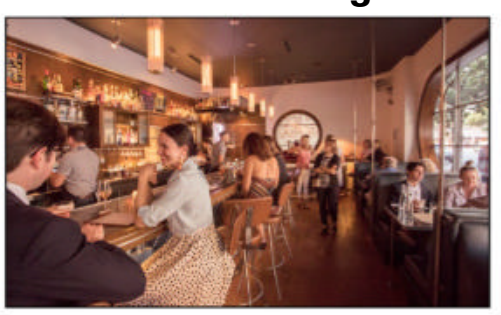
While oil is heating, combine flour, 2 tsp salt, Aleppo pepper, and black pepper in a pie pan or wide, shallow bowl and mix thoroughly. Using tongs, lift a chicken piece from marinade, allowing excess to drip back into dish, and transfer to flour mixture. Coat thoroughly on all sides, then lift again and very gently tap to allow excess flour to fall off. Transfer to a rack. Repeat with remaining chicken pieces.

Working in batches so as not to crowd pan, lower chicken pieces skin-side down into hot oil. Adjust heat if necessary to maintain a temperature of at least 325. Flip chicken pieces every few minutes to allow for even cooking. Cook until chicken is golden brown all over and a meat thermometer inserted into thickest part of each piece registers 165. This will take 8 to 15 minutes, depending on size of piece. Transfer cooked chicken to clean rack and allow to cool for at least 10 minutes before serving.

Drizzle each piece of chicken with saffron honey. Serves 4.

Dining out: Savannah's fresh takes on Southern cooking

Savannah's dining scene is "just as stunning as its famed architecture and Spanish moss–lined roads," said Matt Kirouac in *Tasting Table*. There's a wealth of talent in the city's kitchens, with Mashama Bailey the flagbearer since she was awarded the 2022 James Beard Award for the nation's outstanding chef of the year. All over town, chefs are making the most of the year-round bounty provided by northeastern Georgia's fertile soil and Savannah's proximity to the coast.



The bar scene at the Grey

The Grey Bailey expresses her culinary artistry in an art deco former Greyhound bus terminal now outfitted with an oyster and cocktail bar that gives way to a soaring dining room. Bailey does unexpected things with Lowcountry staples—serving black bass in a bouillabaisse broth, sunchokes with oxtail pot roast, or sweet potatoes with Swiss chard and coconut milk. *109 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.*

Fleeting Rob Newton's restaurant at the new Eastern Wharf development "feels like an instant classic." The Arkansas-born, New York City–seasoned chef commands a stunning space at the Thompson Savannah hotel and oversees a seasonal menu that "honors the city's soulful roots" while looking forward. Start, perhaps, with a shaved collard green salad with anchovy dressing, followed by pan-roasted market fish or spiced duck breast. *201 Port St.*

Brochu's Family Tradition At this "rustic-chic" newcomer in the Starland District, acclaimed Chicago transplant Andrew Brochu is putting his own twists on Southern comfort foods. An extensive oyster menu gives way to such options as barbecued swordfish and dirty rice with grilled chicken. Desserts include banana pudding with bourbon bananas. *2400 Bull St.*

Chris Simpson , Chia Chong

Wine: Chilean sauvignon blanc

Chile's Casablanca and Leyda valleys are starting to be recognized for producing world-class sauvignon blanc, said Jesica Vargas in *Wine Enthusiast*. Both regions have granite-rich soil and are cooled by the Pacific Ocean's Humboldt current, resulting in wines of vibrant acidity and minerality that rival New Zealand's best.

2021 Morandé Estate Reserve ($14). A great value, this Casablanca wine balances creamy exotic fruit flavors with "refreshing acidity" and "subtle chamomile notes."

2020 Viña Marty Goutte d'Argent ($18). "Delicate aromas of honey, peach, and quince" lead the way in this "subtly citrusy" Leyda Valley wine whose stone-fruit flavors get a crisp finish.

2021 Garces Silva Amayna ($26). Leyda's "electric acidity" enlivens this wine, which offers aromas of lime and green peas, notes of peach and citrus, and a saline finish.

Travel

This week's dream: Exploring the world's oldest rain forest

"Imagine following a boardwalk through dense, 180 million–year-old jungle and stumbling on a secluded swimming hole," said Olivia Young in *Thrillist*. Australia's Daintree Rainforest predates the Amazon by 160 million years, making it the oldest tropical rain forest in the world. The great naturalist David Attenborough once called Daintree National Park "the most extraordinary place on earth," and who could argue? The park's "sprawling tangle of towering palms, ancient ferns, moss-covered boulders, and trickling creeks" provides a living link to a large swath of the evolutionary history of life on Earth. "The Daintree once accommodated dinosaurs, and if you're lucky enough to cross paths with any of its modern-day inhabitants"—such as its crocodiles and prehistoric-looking cassowaries—"you'll discover that not much has changed over the millennia."

Road-trippers heading north from Cairns on the "staggeringly scenic" Great Barrier Reef Drive "would be remiss not to hang

A tourist swimming the park's Mossman Gorge

a left toward Kuranda." The jungle town's famous heritage markets are "worth the short detour" for souvenirs such as opal jewelry and didgeridoos. Once you're hiking, it's pretty easygoing—"cruisy," as Aussies would say—because many of the trails follow boardwalks. Near Cape Tribulation, the Dubuji Boardwalk leads to Myall Beach. "Try to arrive at low tide for amazing rockpooling." A short drive south, the Jindalba Boardwalk is flanked by king ferns and fig trees. "Keep your eyes peeled for cassowaries, musky rat kangaroos, platypuses, and even pythons basking in the canopy."

The white sand beaches that fringe Daintree Rainforest are gorgeous. Swimming can be dangerous, though, because venomous jellyfish patrol the waters from November to May. Fortunately, Mossman Gorge is "arguably even prettier," and that's where I swam—in a calm, clear pool "under a thundering waterfall." A three-minute drive from Mossman took me to Janbal Gallery, an Aboriginal-owned cultural center where I learned about the Eastern Kuku Yalanji people, who have lived in the Wet Tropics of Queensland for 50,000 years. Theirs is thought to be the world's oldest living culture, and the paintings and boomerangs that you'll find here "make the most unique souvenirs."
At Daintree Ecolodge (daintree-ecolodge.com.au), canopy bayans start at $404.

Hotel of the week

The gardened central plaza

Sofitel Legend Casco Viejo

Panama City

Panama City's Old Quarter hasn't changed much since the 17th century, said Lane Nieset in *Travel + Leisure*. What has changed is Casco Viejo's former Union Club, a 1917 French colonial landmark that recently reopened as a 159-room luxury hotel. Doormen in Panama hats and women in *pollera* dresses greet visitors at the hotel's regal entrance, and orchids perfume the central plaza, where one day I spotted Gloria Estefan having lunch. Most rooms have water views, and when I sunbathed by the waterfront infinity pool, "it felt like I had slipped away to one of Panama's private island resorts."
sofitel-legend-panama.com; doubles from $314

Getting the flavor of...

Johnson City, Texas

"LBJ would be proud," said Clayton Maxwell in *Texas Monthly*. The small Hill Country hometown of our 36th president still has only 1,700 residents, but it "quietly hums," providing a crossroads stop worth planning for. Named for Lyndon B. Johnson's grandfather and founded in 1879, the county seat is home to ranch families that date back generations, but also to a growing number of artists, winemakers, and scrappy business owners. Rusted 1880s silos in the middle of town now house "a small but excellent" science museum, and bikers from across Texas swoon over the "two-wheeled beauties" at the Texas Vintage Motorcycle Museum. Good tacos are "never out of reach," thanks to a few excellent food trucks, including Cast Iron Punk and others that share a pavilion at West Main Streatery. Pecan Street Brewing is "the living room of Johnson City," but make time for local wine-tasting rooms. And after visiting LBJ's family ranch, visitors can explore Pedernales Falls State Park, "one of the best places in Central Texas for a cool summer swim."

Mississippi's cultural capital

You won't ever have to ask where to stay in downtown Meridian, Miss., said Jim Beaugez in *Garden & Gun*. The city of 35,000, "a low-key getaway destination" known as Mississippi's unofficial cultural capital, recently celebrated the conversion of its unmissable tallest building into a centrally located hotel. The Threefoot Hotel, which occupies a 16-story art deco tower, now stands at the heart of the city's walkable downtown, adding its throwback glamour and a rooftop bar to the visitor experience. A few blocks away sits the Mississippi Arts & Entertainment Experience, or the MAX, a museum that celebrates Mississippi cultural giants from William Faulkner to Oprah Winfrey. The nearby Jimmie Rodgers Museum honors the Meridian native son known as the Father of Country Music. Railroads made the city a music hub, and the tradition continues at places like Brickhaus, which pairs live music with 63 craft beers, and the "elegantly restored" 1890 Grand Opera House, which hosts national acts. Refuel at Weidmann's, an 1870 lunch counter that serves a good black bottom pie.

Florida's pesky red tides

Beachgoers, beware, said Cheryl McCloud in the Sarasota, Fla., *Herald-Tribune*. Red tides, also known as toxic algal blooms, are plaguing southwest Florida, with six counties affected and the worst concentrations between St. Petersburg and Naples. The blooms arrived in the fall, as usual, but they've lingered longer this time. A red tide is a high concentration of *Karenia brevis* algae, which can color the water and produces toxins that kill marine life, littering shorelines with dead fish. Red tides can also cause serious illness; at high-risk beaches, even breathing the ocean breeze leads to coughing, throat irritation, and asthma attacks. For red tide maps, check with the NOAA or the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (myfwc.com). Fortunately, Florida's east coast has not been affected.

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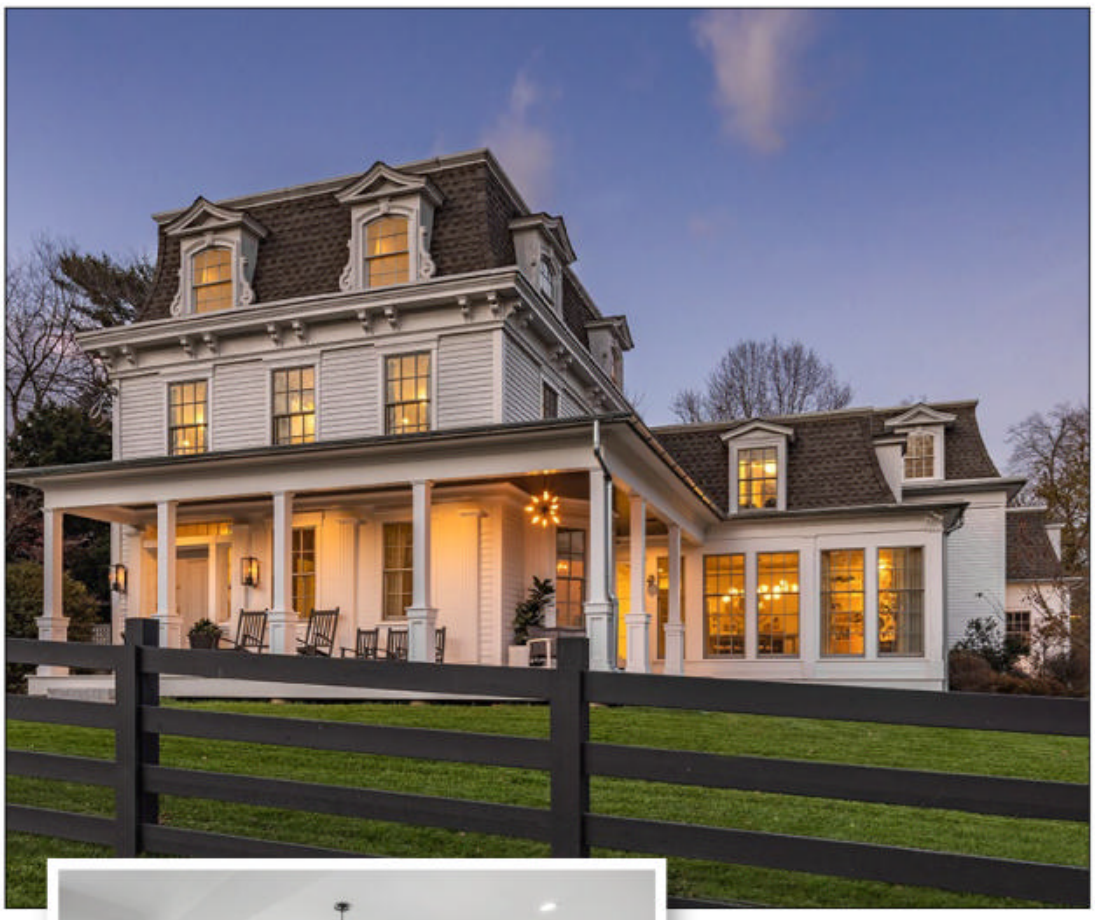
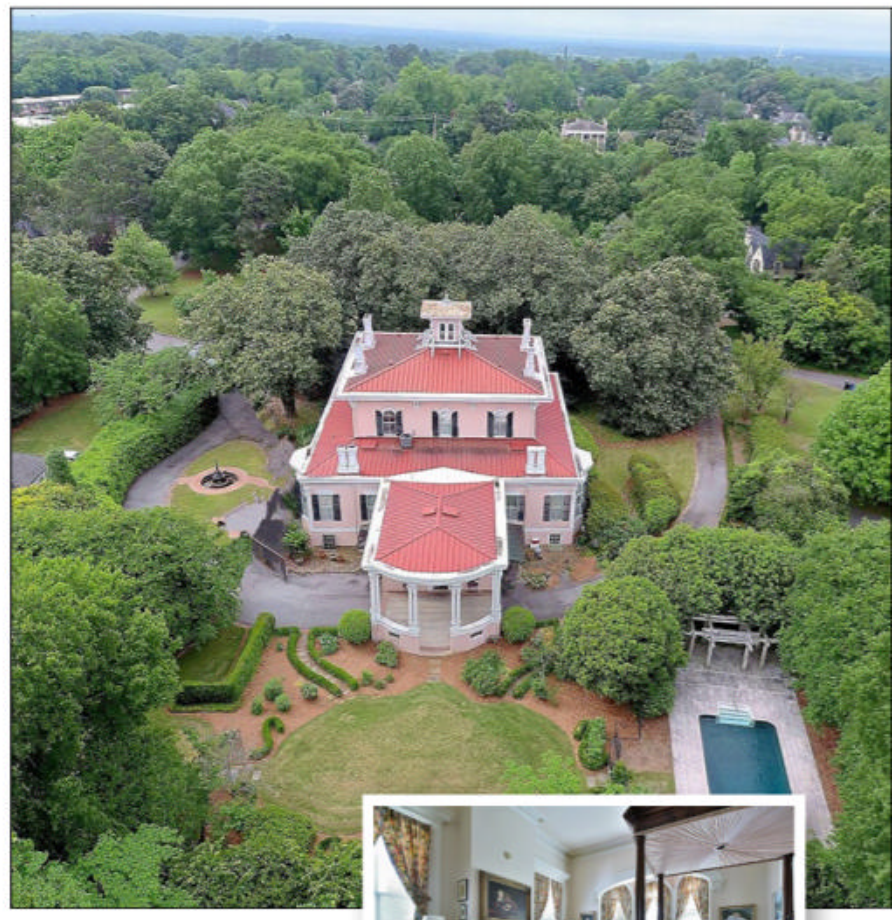
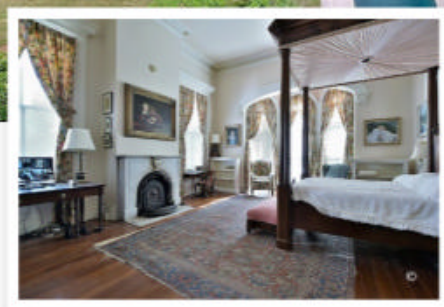
SCAN TO ORDER

This week: Homes in the Italianate style



Exterior: Borgatta Photography; Interior: Julia Dags

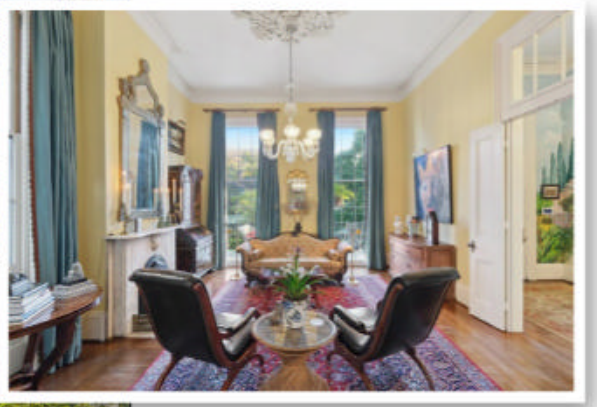




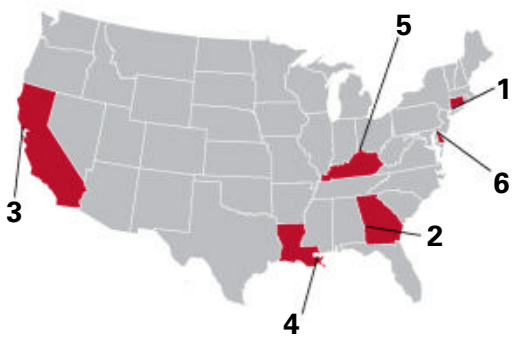
1 ▲ Westport, Conn. Built in 1840, this four-bedroom home was restored and expanded in 2019. The house has a front porch with herringbone ceiling, white-washed decking, and gas lanterns; chef's kitchen with fireplace; primary suite with two bathrooms; playroom with bay window, reading nook, and craft area; and breezeway to the new three-car garage. The 1-acre Old Hill lot has a garden, yard, two-bedroom post-and-beam guesthouse with kitchen and great room, and climate-controlled play shed. $3,895,000. Karen Scott, Compass, (203) 613-9200

2 ▲ Columbus, Ga. The Dinglewood House, built in 1859, is on the National Register of Historic Places. The five-bedroom home features 16-foot ceilings with ornate plaster insets and corbels; carved archways; walnut doors and mahogany staircase; nine fireplaces, most with the original marble mantels; gourmet kitchen; dining room; great room; and library. The 3.6-acre property, in a historic district abutting a wooded park, includes a wraparound piazza, yards, gardens, mature trees, and an in-ground pool. $1,750,000. Melissa Thomas, Coldwell Banker Realty, (706) 575-0669

3 ◀ Santa Rosa, Calif. This 1880 Italianate Victorian is in the St. Rose Historic District. The three-bedroom house has the original crown molding, interior pillars, and living room fireplace surround; updates including modern solar, integrated speakers, and chef's kitchen; and a one-bedroom guest apartment. Outside are orange trees, stacked-stone garden beds, a covered patio with outdoor kitchen, and a two-car garage; shops, restaurants, and cultural attractions are walking distance. $1,350,000. Cathy Wade Shepard, Sotheby's International Realty–Wine Country–Sonoma Brokerage, (707) 481-0649



4 ◀ New Orleans Built circa 1877, this three-bedroom home near the Garden District is an Italianate example of a Southern center-hall cottage. The house features the original leaded-glass front door, interior French doors, living room fireplace with marble surround, and stately floor-to ceiling windows; Matteo Neivert tropical murals; and recently updated plumbing, electrical, roof, kitchen, and bathrooms. A wraparound back porch overlooks a patio with swimming pool surrounded by palm trees and a garden courtyard with a fountain. $1,699,000. Joey Walker, Rêve Realtors, (504) 610-5637



5 ▶ Covington, Ky. The Ashbrook, on a corner property in Old Seminary Square, dates to the 1860s. The three-story, five-bedroom house has 12-foot ceilings, tall windows, antique wood floors, six ornate fireplaces, carved-wood staircase, remodeled eat-in kitchen with marble countertops, and attached one-bedroom apartment with private entry. On the four-lot parcel are mature plantings, a grassy yard, a brick-paved garden patio, and a two-car garage; Cincinnati is 10 minutes by car across the Ohio River. $1,180,000. Carole Carter, Coldwell Banker Realty, (513) 260-6694

Steal of the week

6 ◀ Middletown, Del. This six-bedroom Italianate brick home with Second Empire details was built circa 1884. On the National Register of Historic Places, the house retains the original hardwood floors, stained-glass windows, frosted-glass doors, oak fretwork, walnut staircase, and hardware; it has formal living and dining rooms and a chef's kitchen with mudroom; updates include solar and geothermal panels. Outside are a front porch, a large yard, and a back patio displaying a fish-pond and massive ginkgo tree. $495,000. Michael Kelczewski, Monument Sotheby's International Realty, (302) 383-1983

BUSINESS
The news at a glance

The bottom line

■ The 25 highest-earning hedge-fund managers made $21.5 billion in 2022, the third-highest figure after 2020 and 2021. This works out to an average of about $860 million each. The seven highest earners all made more than $1 billion, led by Citadel's Ken Griffin at $4.1 billion.
Institutional Investor

■ Forty-nine percent of U.S. large-cap active equity funds outperformed the S&P 500 last year, up from 15 percent in 2021. Over a 20-year period, however, 95 percent of the actively managed funds lagged the market.
Bloomberg

■ U.S. daters are collectively spending $117.4 billion annually looking for love, or $1,560 per person per year, up 40 percent in the past decade, according to Match Group.
The Hustle

■ Some 74 percent of consumers said they had experienced a product or service problem in the past year, up from 56 percent in 2017. Only 32 percent told researchers they had experienced a problem in 1976, when the National Customer Rage Survey was first conducted.
The Wall Street Journal

■ China set an economic growth target of 5 percent for 2023, the lowest in decades. China didn't set a target in 2020, when it was paralyzed by the Covid outbreak. But last year, China's GDP grew by 3 percent, well short of its official target of 5.5 percent.
CNN.com

■ Less than one-third of respondents to a monthly survey conducted by Fannie Mae said they expect their personal financial situation to get better over the next year—the lowest reading in a series that goes back more than a decade.
Bloomberg

Pharma: Walgreens limits abortion pill sales

Angering both red and blue states

Walgreens was "caught in the crossfire" of the culture wars last week after saying it would stop dispensing abortion medication in 21 Republican-led states, said **Alice Miranda Ollstein** in ***Politico***. The nation's second-largest pharmacy chain said it would comply with a notice from the state attorneys general in February "threatening legal action if the company began distributing" abortion pills by mail or in stores—even in several states where abortion remains legal, including Alaska, Iowa, Kansas, and Montana. In January the Food and Drug Administration moved to let retail pharmacies sell mifepristone. A spokesperson for California Gov. Gavin Newsom said Walgreens had "caved to right-wing bullies," and the state cut business ties with the chain.

Walgreens' capitulation to "a political scare tactic" is deeply disturbing, said the ***Los Angeles Times*** in an editorial. Consider how Kansas Attorney General Kris Kobach crowed in a news release that Walgreens' decision was "a significant victory for the pro-life cause." Never mind that abortion remains legal in the state after voters rejected a proposed ban in August. We could understand "if Walgreens put out a statement saying their hands were tied in the 10 states where abortion is banned," but yielding this easily to political pressure sets "a dangerous example" that is sure to inspire "more people to bully businesses."

Federal reserve: Powell hints at faster rate increases

Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell warned this week that the fight against inflation isn't over, said Jeff Cox in *CNBC.com*. In a Capitol Hill appearance, Powell cited data which indicated that "inflation has reversed the deceleration it showed in late 2022" and suggested that rates "are likely to head higher than policymakers had expected." After ramping up its benchmark fund rate eight times last year, the Fed eased up slightly last month, issuing only a quarter-percentage-point increase. Following Powell's warning, traders increased bets that the Fed would deliver a higher half-point increase in March.

Airlines: U.S. seeks to block JetBlue-Spirit merger

The Justice Department filed a lawsuit this week to block the merger between JetBlue and Spirit Airlines, said Niraj Chokshi in *The New York Times*. The carriers agreed to combine last year in a $3.8 billion deal to create the fifth-largest airline in the U.S., helping JetBlue "better compete with the nation's largest airlines." The Justice Department's antitrust division said that by absorbing Spirit, JetBlue "would eliminate a disruptive force that has kept fares low across the country" and reduce competition on more than 150 routes.

Banking: Silvergate shuts down after FTX collapse

Silvergate Capital, a bank known for its closeness with the crypto industry, shut down this week after massive losses linked to failed crypto exchange FTX, said Rachel Louise Ensign in *The Wall Street Journal*. The bank "helped institutional investors move dollars in and out of crypto-trading platforms," a business that has quickly "unraveled." However, unlike digital currency exchanges that have gone bankrupt, Silvergate is a bank with accounts insured by the government, and the company said it will repay all depositors.

Repeat performance: Altria bets on vaping—again

Altria isn't out of the vaping business yet, said Jennifer Maloney and Robb M. Stewart in *The Wall Street Journal*. The Marlboro maker agreed this week to buy e-cigarette startup NJOY Holdings for $2.75 billion, shortly after it finally divested its disastrous stake in the embattled vaping brand Juul. Altria "spent nearly $13 billion" on a Juul stake in 2018, but thousands of lawsuits and regulatory scrutiny over Juul's advertising tactics sent the company near to bankruptcy. Unlike Juul, NJOY has already "obtained clearance from the FDA to sell its tobacco-flavored e-cigarettes in the U.S."

Swiss stand fast on mighty Matterhorn

Toblerone isn't "Swiss" enough anymore to keep the Matterhorn image on its packaging, said Jenny Gross in *The New York Times*. The chocolate maker has used the Alpine peak, "one of Switzerland's most famous landmarks," since 1970. But after Toblerone's parent company, Mondelez, decided to shift some production to Slovakia, the Swiss government said maintaining the Matterhorn image would be "misleading." A 2017 "Swissness" law specifically ruled that "national symbols can be used to promote chocolate only when the milk it contains is sourced exclusively from Switzerland," and the manufacturing also takes place domestically. Switzerland has been fighting a rear-guard action to protect "Swissness," suffering a defeat last year when a U.S. court ruled that Switzerland's Gruyère region didn't even need to be the source of Gruyère cheese.

AP, Getty

Working women: Burned out in the corner office

An exodus of influential female executives "has the potential to unwind decades of progress," said **Jennifer Liu** in *CNBC.com*. Last month, YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki, one of Google's longest-tenured employees, announced she was leaving to focus on "family, health, and personal projects." Days later, Meta's chief business officer, Marne Levine, also stepped down after 13 years, following in the footsteps of former chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg, who left her role in 2022. These are high-profile examples of an alarming trend: "Women leaders are leaving their organizations at the highest rate ever," according to LeanIn.org and the consulting firm McKinsey. For every woman stepping into a director-level role today, "two are choosing to leave." And more seem to be heading that way: 43 percent of women leaders report they are burned out, compared with 31 percent of men.

Wojcicki led a wave of high-profile departures.

Women in the C-suite are stressed and exhausted, said **Marguerite Ward** in *Business Insider*. To get there, many have taken on "the workload of two or three people to get ahead." And now, after they've climbed the ladder, they are calling it quits. I can't help but wonder if "all the years of punching at the glass ceiling" didn't leave them drained. Unfortunately, these decisions "can have broad consequences," indirectly affecting younger women and making "us doubt whether there's room for us at the top."

Indeed, women leaving at the top is a reflection of how progress for women has stalled across the workforce, said **Aaron Gregg** and **Jacob Bogage** in *The Washington Post*. Pew Research reported last week that women make 82 cents at the median for every dollar made by men, only 2 cents more than in 2002. It's a sharp reversal of "the strides made in the 1980s and '90s—when the pay gap narrowed by 15 cents—"even though more women today hold a college degree than men. The gender pay gap is much smaller for younger women. Then "it widens when family responsibilities come into play."

Gen X women, now in the prime of their careers, were actually "less likely to leave the workplace" during the pandemic, said **Jonnelle Marte** in *Bloomberg Businessweek*. However, labor market experts say the "extra duties assumed" by many of these women are "taking a belated toll." More than half of female senior managers say they are "responsible for most or all of their family's housework and child care, compared with 13 percent of men at the same level." The burnout problem has grown so acute with the labor shortage that companies like Amazon and Goldman Sachs are leaning into "returnships," short-term programs meant to lure professional women back onto the fast track.

What the experts say

Tax status: Happily separate

A growing number of married couples are finding savings through separate tax return filings, said Laura Saunders in *The Wall Street Journal*. One factor likely boosting the trend is the income-driven loan repayment program for student loans. Borrowers in this program pay a percentage of their monthly income, and the remaining debt may be forgiven after a term of years. This incentivizes couples to "file separately to lower their income." Not all states require filers to use the same status for the state return as the federal one. One couple "reaped substantial savings by having one spouse file separately for Illinois" while the other, who is retired, claimed residence in Florida. "They filed jointly on the federal return." One downside: "Married couples filing separately can't take certain tax breaks," including child- and dependent-care credits.

Covid disability benefits

Social Security disability benefits are now available if you're a Covid "long hauler," said Steven Perrigo in *Kiplinger*. Last year, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services ruled that long Covid—when Covid symptoms last for weeks or months after a patient tests negative—is a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act. That entitles some sufferers to claim Social Security insurance if their lingering symptoms are so severe that "full- or even part-time work is no longer an option." But approval is tricky. SSDI is only "designated for disabilities that have lasted" at least 12 months. There's also "no standard process for diagnosing long Covid." Applicants should maintain "a detailed record of symptoms," along with proof of regular doctor visits.

Underwater auto loans

More drivers are at risk of carrying auto debt that exceeds their vehicle's value, said Paige Smith and Michael Sasso in *Bloomberg*. With car prices still elevated and inventory low, regulators are worrying about consumers spending their depleted savings on auto loans that could quickly put them underwater. "About 2 out of 13" new car buyers are making monthly car payments of $1,000 or more. To make the costs more manageable, "lenders keep extending loan terms." For a pricey used vehicle, that could mean "owing on a car that won't even run." There is short-term risk, too, once used-car prices finally begin to slide back to Earth: "Anyone who bought at the top of the market will fall further into the trap of negative equity."

AP

Charity of the week

For two decades, the **Wikimedia Foundation (wikimediafoundation.org)** has ensured free access to more than 45 million articles in approximately 300 languages through Wikipedia, the internet's encyclopedia. Established in 2003, the nonprofit has more than 300,000 volunteer editors and hosts more than 10 virtual projects, including Wikimedia Commons, a public domain photo repository, and Wiktionary, a collaborative lexicon. Besides providing the technical infrastructure for the distribution of online content, the foundation also supports individuals through several grants, including the Wikimedia Community Fund, for projects that promote knowledge equity. Next May, the nonprofit will host its 10th annual Wiki Workshop, a virtual forum that brings together researchers from around the world to exchange ideas.

Each charity we feature has earned a four-star overall rating from Charity Navigator, which rates not-for-profit organizations on the strength of their finances, their governance practices, and the transparency of their operations. Four stars is the group's highest rating.

Tesla: A carmaker for the masses?

It's time for Tesla to give the people what they want, said **Hasan Chowdhury** in ***Business Insider***: a new, cheaper electric vehicle. The company's much-hyped investor jamboree last week "was widely expected to put front and center an affordable version of its pricey EVs—showing the company meant business when it came to delivering affordable vehicles." Chief executive Elon Musk even promoted the event as "the launch of part 3 of Tesla's Master Plan." Tesla's stock has soared this year, spurred on by a big price cut in January that helped stoke demand; for a short while in February, Musk was (once again) the world's richest person. But investors wiped $50 billion off the company's market cap after the ballyhooed "Master Plan" became "a four-hour slog" of technical details and "vanity projects like the CyberTruck."

The Berlin Gigafactory, part of Tesla's rapid expansion

"Musk did say something very important," even if it wasn't what investors were looking for, said **Al Root** in ***Barron's***. Musk has set a goal for Tesla to make 20 million vehicles a year within a decade. That's double what global leader Toyota produces, and Musk said Tesla will need only 10 models to do it. "That's the bombshell. It's an incredibly low number." Musk compares the evolution of cars to that of smartphones, which once came in any number of form factors. Now "no one really cares about the shape of their phone," and the vast majority come with the same basic, easy-to-manufacture shape. If Tesla succeeds in bringing this kind of simplification to cars, it will mean a "radical departure from the way things are done" for the whole auto industry.

We've already witnessed what lower prices mean for Tesla demand, said **Richard Waters** in the ***Financial Times***. "A round of price cuts in January" across all models "had an immediate impact" on sales. This week, Tesla again lowered the starting price of the Model S by 5 percent to $89,990, "while the cost of the lowest-priced Model X has come down 9 percent to $99,990." It was more than $120,000 for a Model X last year. Musk once said getting the affordable Model 3 off the ground was "production hell," said **Jonathan Guilford** in **Reuters**. Is he ready for a second trip through the inferno? Making a cheaper car will "require radical cost cuts," considering a large percentage of gross margins are currently chewed up by R&D. "Still, Musk pulled off the seemingly impossible before."

The launch of Tesla's latest Master Plan may have fizzled, but Tesla is still doing far better than its would-be EV rivals, said **Chris Bryant** in ***Bloomberg***. Electric truck maker Rivian reported a $6.8 billion loss last year, with production costs almost three times bigger than its revenue. Meanwhile, luxury EV maker Lucid lost $2.6 billion, making just 7,000 vehicles. Those companies' negative margins "far exceed anything Tesla experienced in its early days." Their cars simply "cost too much to produce, and they can't raise prices sufficiently to compensate." Yet both are currently building new factories, and it's "too late to backtrack on their capital binge." They'll just continue incinerating money, hoping they can eventually scale up enough to justify it.

The end of the office bidding wars

Tyler Cowen
Bloomberg

"Why should a major corporation invest in more office space if a lot of that space will be used only part-time?" asked Tyler Cowen. The question seems relevant after Amazon's decision last week to pause construction on its second headquarters in northern Virginia, four years after the company had held a nationwide bidding war for the right to accommodate its $2.5 billion office complex. Since the pandemic, workers have stated they don't intend to resume their office-bound lifestyles. "It is worth thinking about how this trend will affect" not just big businesses but regional evolution as well. Numerous U.S. cities—like Austin, Miami, Nashville, and Boise, Idaho—have pointedly made themselves more "business-friendly" in recent years, offering tax breaks and other incentives to lure companies to relocate. However, "even if its leaders succeed in convincing a company to relocate," they might not get its workers to come to town, too. There's no guarantee that a new headquarters will bring retail and cultural amenities. "I'll miss the effect those Amazon workers might have had on the value of my home" in Virginia. But the broader trend holds positives as well. States and cities that have concentrated on perks to attract corporations could shift to attracting people, with things like better schools and parks—perks for everyone.

A dystopia that never quite arrives

The Economist

Fears that robots are coming for our jobs are not new, said *The Economist*. So far, they have never materialized. In fact, quite the contrary. Today, "labor markets across the rich world are historically tight —and getting structurally tighter as societies age." There are two jobs open for every unemployed American, the highest rate on record. The immediate problem isn't too much automation, but too little. Occupational robot usage has been on the rise, but adoption is still low, especially in the West. South Korean firms "employ 10 manufacturing workers for every industrial robot." The figure in America is 25–40 to 1. Overall, in 2020, the global industrial robot business was just $25 billion. "People spent more on sex toys." Office automation hasn't been any different. In theory, digitization should streamline "routine tasks like ordering inventory, paying suppliers or totting up accounts." In practice, most businesses still "use a tangle of outdated and incompatible systems." As buzzy AI tools like ChatGPT dazzle users, terrified observers warn "about a looming job apocalypse." Indeed, a law firm last month launched a virtual assistant with "ChatGPT-like powers." The bad news for AI is that it still needs human beings "to cross-check everything the bot spits out." The lawyers' jobs, at least, seem very secure.

Shutterstock

The tough-guy actor who battled addiction

Tom Sizemore
1961–2023

Tom Sizemore trafficked in menace and mayhem both onscreen and off. The actor earned acclaim for the intensity he brought to roles as gangsters, corrupt cops, soldiers, and psychopaths, including a murderous detective in Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killer*s (1994), the enforcer in Robert De Niro's bank-robbing gang in *Heat* (1995), and Tom Hanks' second-in-command in Steven Spielberg's World War II drama *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). But Sizemore's successes were soon eclipsed by his personal turmoil. In and out of rehab for heroin and cocaine addiction, he faced bankruptcy and homelessness. He served time for drug offenses and for physically abusing girlfriend Heidi Fleiss, aka the "Hollywood Madam," in 2003. In later years Sizemore, who died from a stroke and brain aneurysm, faced additional battery arrests and a 2017 conviction. "I have permitted my personal demons to take over my life," he wrote to the judge in the Fleiss case.

Sizemore grew up in Detroit, where his father was a lawyer and philosophy professor and his mother worked for the city ombudsman, said *The Times* (U.K.). By his own account a wayward and angry teenager, he decided to become an actor at 15, "inspired by the films of James Dean and Marlon Brando." He studied acting at Temple University, then moved to New York, where he waited tables and acted off-Broadway. Relocating to Hollywood, Sizemore got his first break in 1989 with a bit part as a disabled Vietnam vet in Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July*. He then "seemingly exploded into Hollywood overnight," said *Rolling Stone*. He worked with his hero De Niro—who corralled him into rehab in 1998—and was cast by a slew of "big-time directors" including Tony Scott (*True Romance*), Martin Scorsese (*Bringing Out the Dead*), and Michael Bay (*Pearl Harbor*) before substance abuse issues began to derail his career.

Even while personal travails "sent him spiraling," Sizemore continued to work, said *New York* magazine, albeit in diminished roles and increasingly low-budget productions. In 2007 he appeared in *Shooting Sizemore*, a reality series about his addiction struggles; in 2010 he was featured on *Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew*. By then he was in rehab for the ninth time. "I've led an interesting life," he wrote in a 2013 memoir, "but I can't tell you what I'd give to be the guy you didn't know anything about."

The Manson acolyte who turned on the cult

Linda Kasabian
1949–2023

Linda Kasabian once would have followed Charles Manson to the ends of the earth. As a member of the Family—the cult Manson ran on the grounds of a former Los Angeles film set—she believed, she later said, that he was "the second coming of Christ" who spoke "pure truth." On Aug. 8, 1969, at age 20, she obeyed his instructions to accompany Susan Atkins, Patricia Krenwinkel, and Charles Watson to the home of Roman Polanski and his wife, Sharon Tate. That was the start of a two-day murder spree that left seven people, including the eight-months-pregnant Tate, dead. But Kasabian didn't kill anyone. Instead, she became the key witness for the prosecution. "I'm not you, Charlie," she recalled telling him. "I can't kill anybody."

Born in Biddeford, Maine, Linda Darlene Drouin grew up with parents who were "permanently at war," said *The Telegraph* (U.K.). After dropping out of high school at 16, she was soon dabbling in hallucinogens and free love, drifting with her hippie husband, Bob Kasabian, from state to state until he left her stranded with her infant daughter. A Manson acolyte brought her to Spahn Ranch, where Manson "sexually initiated her into his hippie Family." Kasabian went along on "creepy crawls," in which members would burglarize nearby homes, said the *Los Angeles Times*. The only cult member with a driver's license, she stayed outside as lookout during the murders at Polanski and Tate's house and the subsequent killing of two more people the following night. But Kasabian thwarted another set of planned murders by "deliberately knocking on the wrong door" and then fled to her mother's house in New Hampshire. At the trial, she got immunity in exchange for her cooperation and testified for 18 days, speaking in front of Manson in court as he drew his finger across his throat in a silent threat to kill her. Manson and his followers received life sentences.

Kasabian spent her later years in Tacoma, working as an in-home caregiver, said *The Washington Post*. She "declined most interviews," but in 2009 appeared in disguise on *Larry King Live*, expressing regret for the crimes of her youth. "I felt then what I feel now," she said, "that it was a waste of life that had no reason, no rhyme. It was wrong. And it hurt a lot of people."

Getty (2)

The saxophonist who shaped decades of modern jazz

Wayne Shorter
1933–2023

Wayne Shorter's playing was instantly recognizable. With a low-gloss tone on tenor saxophone and a brightness on soprano, the jazz musician and composer won 12 Grammy Awards in a career that spanned more than 50 years. He was a major force in several of the greatest jazz groups of the 20th century: In the 1950s he played in Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, in the 1960s he joined the freewheeling second Miles Davis Quintet, and in 1970 he co-founded the jazz fusion band Weather Report. He also played on 10 Joni Mitchell albums and collaborated with Steely Dan. Through all these projects, he never let tradition box him in. "The word 'jazz,' to me," he said, "only means 'I dare you.'"

Born in Newark, N.J., young Shorter "was captivated by bebop" he heard on the radio, said *The Guardian*. He started playing the clarinet at 15, but soon switched to saxophone and studied music education at New York University. Playing in the city's jazz scene during college, he earned the nickname the Newark Flash. After two years in the Army, he returned to New York and never stopped performing.

Shorter founded a quartet in 2000 and by his final years had "entered a phase of late eminence," said *The New York Times*. The loss of his 14-year-old daughter in 1985 led him to Buddhism, a faith that solaced him when his wife died in a plane crash in 1996. He won a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2015, followed by a Kennedy Center Honor in 2017. A lifelong lover of comic books and science fiction, he maintained his sense of play to the end. "Don't throw away your childish dreams," he said in 2012. "You have to be strong enough to protect them."

The man who dug up a nuclear bomb

When a B-52 crashed in North Carolina, the military turned to Jack ReVelle to recover its payload, said **Jeremy Markovich** in his **NC Rabbit Hole** *substack. His heroism stayed classified for decades.*

ON A COLD, wet day in January 1961, Lt. Jack ReVelle climbed out of a muddy hole in the ground, holding a rough, gray sphere the size of a volleyball against his chest. For the better part of a week, he and his crew had been digging in the swampy ground outside of Goldsboro, N.C. It had been raining and snowing, and the hole had grown to be larger than a football field. Jack was just 25 years old, but he was in charge. When he and his men finally found what they were looking for, Jack was the one who got to climb up the ladder and bring it out.

ReVelle (l.); the first of the two bombs recovered at Goldsboro

Almost immediately, Jack flew back to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. He landed in the late afternoon, and went to bed early. The next morning, he took a shower, sat down at a table in his apartment, and started to write a letter to his parents, who hadn't heard from them for more than a week. It was only then that the magnitude of what he'd done started to set in. His hands started to shake.

Lt. Jack ReVelle had just located and defused two nuclear bombs that accidentally fell out of a B-52 bomber over eastern North Carolina.

It sounds like hyperbole, but the story of the Goldsboro Broken Arrow has now been well documented. Over the past decade, more and more of it has been declassified, thanks in large part to the work of an Air Force veteran named Joel Dobson of Greensboro who first heard the story years ago and just knew he had to write a book about it. I talked to Joel in 2018, and he put me in touch with Jack. Over the course of a few days, our conversation veered from the incredible to the personal, and it left me thinking about the consequences of life and the steady approach of death in a way that has stayed with me ever since.

That volleyball-size orb that he'd carried out of that muddy pit in 1961 was the primary core of a hydrogen bomb, with enough uranium and plutonium inside to create a huge crater, kill tens of thousands of people instantly, and leave parts of eastern North Carolina permanently uninhabitable. The only protection the Air Force gave Jack ReVelle was his military fatigues and a pair of gloves. He held the most radioactive part of the most powerful weapon the world had ever seen up against his chest for 15 minutes. Then, for decades, he couldn't tell anybody exactly what he'd done, not even his wife.

ON THE NIGHT of Jan. 23, 1961, a B-52 bomber radioed back to Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro with a problem: It had a fuel leak in one of its wings. As it was coming back in for a landing, the wing broke off. Five of the eight men on board were able to bail out, including Lt. Adam Mattocks, who's believed to be the only person to escape from a crashing B-52 bomber without using an ejector seat (Mattocks died in 2018). As the plane fell from the sky, it started to break apart, and two thermonuclear bombs on board fell out. In the chaos, several systems on the bombs activated themselves. On one, the parachute deployed, and it drifted down gently to the ground, coming to rest against a tree.

The other one slammed into the ground at 700 miles per hour not far from the fiery wreckage of the plane. Mattocks, banged up and without his military ID, got himself to an Air Force base. He told the airmen at the front gate that a B-52 had crashed, but the word hadn't spread to them yet. Mattocks, a Black man, couldn't prove who he was. So, the airmen arrested him for stealing government property. Shortly afterward, another pilot who recognized Mattocks from flight school vouched for him. Mattocks was released, and his details led the Air Force to the crash site.

That's when Lt. Jack ReVelle got the call, got on a plane in Dayton, Ohio, with the rest of his explosive ordnance disposal team, and flew to North Carolina.

Once Jack got there, he quickly rolled up on the bomb leaning up against a tree, rendered it safe, and had it loaded on the back of a flatbed truck headed for Texas. It was then that he learned there was a second bomb, somewhere beneath a farm field nearby that was strewn with wreckage.

Jack asked for a long wooden stick, like a broom handle, to poke into the wet ground. The reason: He didn't want to touch metal with metal and cause a spark that might cause an explosion. So someone fetched a wooden rod from the back of a truck cab, and ReVelle started feeling around in the muck. Quickly, he knew there was debris down there. After that, he called in the heavy excavators.

The shovels didn't dig too far down before they hit the shallow water table, which meant water constantly needed to be pumped out of the hole. Jack's crew finally found the explosive part of the bomb, as well as some of the systems that would have armed it. On the eighth day, Jack fished it all out of the muddy water at the bottom of the pit. One of his sergeants found another crucial piece.

"Lieutenant, we found the arm/safe switch," he told Jack.

"Great," Jack said.

"*Not* great," the sergeant replied. "It's on arm."

There's far from a consensus on how close those bombs were to going off. Jack himself couldn't say. But had one of them exploded, the other one would have as well. Each bomb was 250 times more powerful than the ones that decimated Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and an explosion that large would have permanently altered the geography of the state. There would have been a 17-mile-wide "kill zone" around the blast site. Heavy fallout would have spread as far north as New York.

U.S. Air Force, Alamy

For years the most harrowing information was kept a secret. And Jack himself couldn't talk about the details of his involvement. It wasn't until Joel Dobson called him in 2011 that he realized that documents about the incident had been declassified. It was then that Jack turned to his wife and shared with her the details about what he'd done in North Carolina.

YEARS AGO, ON the phone from California, Jack ReVelle told me he was "crazy" as a 25-year-old. He drove a 1959 MGA convertible with a car phone in it, so he'd be reachable in case of a nuclear accident. (I asked him if the car phone was impressive whenever he went on dates. "That goes without saying," he told me.) He later met his wife, Brenda, on a computer dating service. In the late 1960s. Jack was different from the other guys she'd met through that service. "He was always an up-front, honest guy," she says.

Jack had been in the ROTC when he was at Purdue University. After he graduated with a degree in chemical engineering, he joined the Air Force and became an officer. While he was stationed in Japan, he heard about the explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) unit, thought it was interesting, went through six months of training in Dayton, and then got the job.

Jack earned the Bronze Star during the Vietnam War, where he was exposed to Agent Orange. He also earned the Joint Service Commendation medal for his work with the Defense Nuclear Agency and was promoted to major. But after 11 years in the Air Force, Jack was ready to move on. In 1969, he was honorably discharged, then earned a Ph.D. in industrial engineering and management from Oklahoma State University. He made a home in Orange County, California. Until 12 years ago, he never publicly talked about what he'd done in North Carolina.

Then Joel Dobson called, interviewed him, and brought him back to the site of the accident. Jack hadn't been there in 50 years, but he recognized the tree where the first bomb had once been leaning. That moment made the hairs on the back of Joel's neck stand up. Jack started telling others about disarming the bombs. He spoke to groups around the country, including at East Carolina University in 2013. "As I carried it up out of that hole," he said of carrying the radioactive sphere, "I remember thinking, 'Don't drop it.'"

But by then, Jack had already started to get sick. A few years before, his doctor thought he had anemia. That didn't make sense to Jack, who'd always thought of himself as a healthy, high-energy guy. But the doctor confirmed it, then sent him off for further blood tests. Those tests led his doctors to diagnose him with Myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS), a precursor to leukemia. Those same doctors also told him that they felt that the disease was likely caused by Jack's exposure to radiation.

AFTER THE STORY was declassified and Jack had his diagnosis, he set out to do two things. The first: to seek official recognition for himself and his men for what they'd done in Goldsboro. The story was out, but the Air Force denied any further recognition or honors, saying that the men were simply doing the job that they'd been assigned to do. In 2014, the Veterans Administration had also denied him further insurance coverage to pay for his treatment because, in their words, there was no direct connection between his exposure to radiation and his sickness. That didn't seem right, Jack told me. "According to all the literature that I have read, the MDS that I have shows itself approximately 50 to 60 years following the radiation exposure," he said.

Searching for the second bomb

Getty

I tried to follow up on a story he'd told me, about a picture that he'd been trying to find for years. Back around 2000, when his story was still classified, Jack was speaking at the Sandia National Laboratories, a government-affiliated facility in New Mexico that performs nuclear research. During some free time, he wandered into a museum that was holding an exhibit about Broken Arrows, the military code name for nuclear mishaps. When he came upon a display about Goldsboro, he froze. There, on the wall, was a picture of Jack climbing up the ladder, with the core of the weapon against his chest. "I felt like I was losing control of my bowels," he said. "Oh, my God, it's documented."

Later, after his story had gone public, Jack, Joel, and Brenda all tried to track down the picture through phone calls and public records requests, but the photo never turned up. Officials at Sandia also looked on my behalf, but never found it.

Meanwhile, after our last conversation, Jack's case languished. I'd search for news about him from time to time, but nothing new showed up. Then last year, I came across a press release about Jack from the lawyers representing him. "In February 2020, the final decision was rendered, granting Dr. ReVelle his benefits," it said. It had taken four years of work, but Jack had won. The release went through the process and details of the case, but only in the second-to-last paragraph did it say what had happened to Jack: "Unfortunately, Dr. ReVelle passed away on January 26, 2020, just three weeks before the decision was rendered."

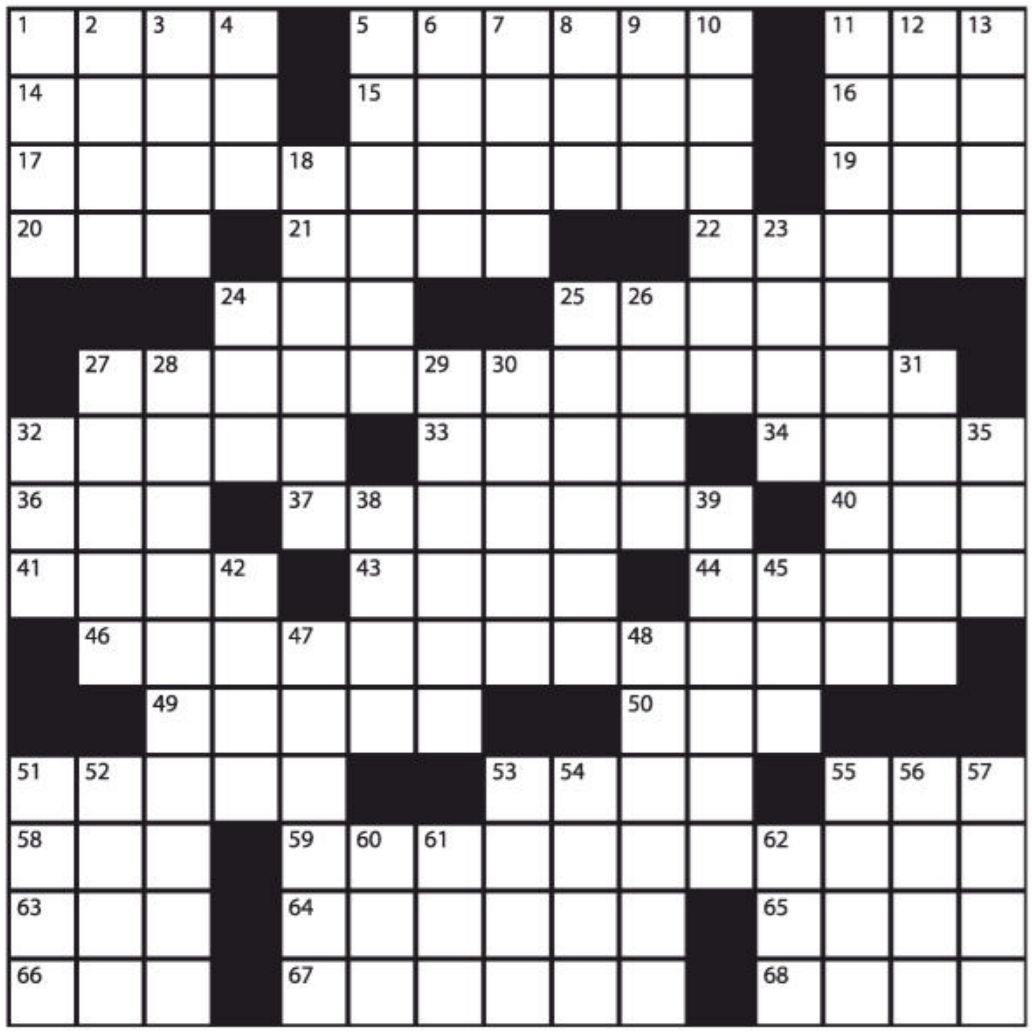
In January, Jack's widow, Brenda, talked to me on the phone from her home in Southern California, relating what had happened in her thick British accent. Even after his death, it still took a sternly worded letter from Brenda for the VA to start paying his benefits.

Jack got weaker and weaker during his final days. At a car show, Brenda needed to hold him up by the shoulders. He'd fall more often, once hitting his head. Hard. After Brenda and Jack's daughter Karen realized they could no longer care for him, he was taken to an assisted living facility. On Jan. 26, 2020, a caretaker came into his room. "Good morning, Jack," she said. She got no response. He'd died in his sleep.

For most of his life, Jack lived with secrets that he could tell no one. In the early days, he didn't get the respect he deserved, Brenda says. Being able to talk about what he'd done, 50 years after he'd done it, lifted a great weight off of his shoulders. "It was a relief," she says. "It gave him a second lease on life."

Adapted from a story that first appeared in NCRabbithole.com. *Used with permission.*

Crossword No. 687: In the Zone by Matt Gaffney



ACROSS

1 With many missions planned there, the European Space Agency last week proposed a new time zone for this place (with "the")
5 1997 Nicolas Cage thriller
11 Part of WWW
14 Colombian city
15 Poet Gorman
16 Nest-egg fund, briefly
17 With one eastward step into China from this country you lose 3.5 hours of your day, because vast China has chosen to use just one time zone
19 Langley org.
20 Org. at airports
21 Medical insertion, for short
22 Minnesota's 11,842 (not 10,000)
24 "Now I get it!"
25 Scent with a number in its name
27 Regions in time zones that observe daylight savings will do this on March 12
32 Fail due to nervousness
33 Best Picture after *The Artist*
34 Some rolls of a die
36 Glimpsed
37 Bookstore section
40 "I'm impressed"
41 Eisenhower and Barinholtz, for two
43 Surname with a tilde
44 Creator of 59-Across
46 Science fiction great who in 1976 argued in favor of One World Time, i.e. abolishing all time zones
49 Shot in the dark
50 TikTok features
51 With 31-Down, old-school cookie
53 World-weary cry
55 "Well the thing is..."
58 Chic tuna
59 *Around the World in 80 Days* protagonist who unwittingly gained a day by traveling eastward through all 24 time zones
63 Attempt on eBay
64 More Stephen King–like
65 Eagerly anticipating
66 Plea from the sea
67 Rasta's locks
68 "Dress for Less" store

DOWN

1 Examination for future docs
2 Klutzy types
3 Gymnast Korbut
4 Bethesda, Md., facility
5 Biblical promised land
6 Exclude
7 *A Beautiful Mind* mathematician
8 Little marcher
9 First lady McKinley
10 Needed replenishing
11 Baskets and patio furniture, often
12 Great Lakes port
13 Flock comments
18 More sore
23 Medical school subj.
24 Noah's craft
25 Fancy brandy
26 Restaurateur Ray
27 ___ Zulu (African king)
28 They deliver juice
29 *Fortnite* fans, e.g.
30 Piece of Swiss bread
31 See 51-Across
32 Vegas show
35 Pronoun for a ship
38 Masterwork
39 Gets around
42 Leave wowed
45 Hosp. areas
47 Put into piles
48 Jackson and Alexander, for two
51 Popular pet puppies
52 East Palestine's state
53 Actress Shawkat
54 Listen to
55 Overly energized
56 They can clash or get deflated
57 Fragile dozen
60 Yonder gal
61 Rage
62 Quite a distance

The Week Contest

This week's question: The National Park Service recently tweeted advising park visitors not to "push a slower friend down" if a bear is chasing them. What real or invented term could be used to describe this extreme form of self-preservation?

Last week's contest: A Miami art show attendee accidentally knocked over a $42,000 Jeff Koons balloon-dog sculpture, shattering it to bits. If the art world's king of kitsch were to present the remnants of the dog as a new work, what should he name it?

THE WINNER: "Man's Burst Friend"
Dave Grossman, Petaluma, Calif.

SECOND PLACE: "Cur Plunk"
Sandra Law, Elkhorn, Wis.

THIRD PLACE: "Pick of the Litter"
Kharin Mishan, South Pasadena, Calif.

For runners-up and complete contest rules, please go to theweek.com/contest.

How to enter: Submissions should be emailed to contest@theweek.com. Please include your name, address, and daytime telephone number for verification; this week, please type "Bear chase" in the subject line. Entries are due by noon, Eastern Time, Tuesday, March 14. Winners will appear on the Puzzle Page next issue and at theweek.com/puzzles on Friday, March 17. In the case of identical or similar entries, the first one received gets credit.

◀ The winner gets a one-year subscription to *The Week*.

Sudoku

Fill in all the boxes so that each row, column, and outlined square includes all the numbers from 1 through 9.

Difficulty: hard

5				4				1
	9		1		3		5	
3		1				4		9
	3						4	
		7		6		1		
	2			8			9	
9			7		4			6
		8				2		
	6						7	

Find the solutions to all *The Week*'s puzzles online: **www.theweek.com/puzzle**.

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I asked what kind of family Amina wanted. She said, ‘A family like yours.’ That’s when I knew I had to adopt her.

Denise, adopted 17-year-old Amina

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Melissa, Michigan

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